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The Policy Broker's Blind; Or, Detective Burr's - : Police Puzzle.



"I MEAN THAT YOU ARE MY PRISONER," ANSWERED THAD BURR, PRESENTING A REVOLVER.

The Policy Broker's Blind;

OR,

Detective Burr's Police Puzzle.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,

AUTHOR OF "THAD BURR" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE "DEAD GIG."

"Got a gig here?"

"Naw."

"Come off! Here's de money; gimme a ticket."

The party addressed stared at the first speaker for a moment with a doubtful expression of countenance, and then broke out in a laugh, as he exclaimed:

"Why, is that you, Pete?"

"Well, I reckon it is," responded the latter. "Who d'ye t'ink it was—de Ozar o' Rooshy?"

"I didn't know but it was somebody like that," laughed the policy "writer." "What d'ye want, Pete?"

"Oh, gimme a 'dead gig,' 9, 19, 29."

"All right; here ye are!" and the "writer" handed out the ticket and raked in the money.

"Think ye've got a winner?"

"Dead sure."

"How's that?"

"Had a dream."

The person addressed as Pete was known, and had been known among the managers of policy shops for a long time, as "Policy Pete," though, had they known his real name and character, there would doubtless have been less familiarity and confidence between them.

As a matter of fact, his right name was Ned Preston, and, although only a young man of twenty, he was one of the keenest detectives in the city.

He had already won considerable renown by working up cases which had been attempted by older men with the result of failure.

At present he was engaged in trying to rout the policy-dealers of the city.

He had got far enough along in the work to discover that over two hundred shops were scattered about, in various parts of the city, and, singularly enough, all owned and controlled by one man.

The name of this man was Edward P. Banks. He was reputed to be rich, his wealth having been acquired through the policy business.

But, although the police knew the man by sight as well as by reputation, and even knew where he lived, they never had been able to prove that he was connected with the policy games supposed to be his, nor to find the man himself!

Therefore Superintendent Byrnes had detailed Preston, who had been so successful with several other difficult cases, to ferret out this one.

Ned Preston was powerfully built, with a good-natured, beardless face and a mild blue eye which looked at you with such simple earnestness that you would never have suspected his business.

He rarely used any disguise except in the matter of clothing and speech.

He could don a slouch hat, assume a swagger and the dialect of the East side, and pass for a tough at a moment's notice; or he could assume the attire and airs of a perfect gentleman quite as readily.

Needless to say he was assuming the character in which he now appeared.

He had played in nearly every one of the numerous shops of the notorious Banks, but thus far he had failed to spot the man himself in any of the places.

As he put the tickets into his pocket on the present occasion he asked carelessly:

"I say, Charlie, where is de old man? Where does he keep himself all de time?"

The policy man stared at him for a moment as if suspecting that the question meant something wrong, but, meeting only the most innocent of boyish faces, he finally replied:

"In his skin, I reckon."

"Tanks, awful!" growled the detective, with a careless shrug of the shoulders. "I

wouldn't 'a' t'ought it. Say, youse is purty gay, ain't yer?"

"Oh, so-so!" grinned the other. "But say, why are you always asking about the old man?"

"'Cause I want see him, see?"

"What for?"

Ned cast his eyes about the room as if to make sure that no one was within earshot, stepped closer to the counter (it was in an alleged cigar store), and, assuming a confidential air, whispered:

"Say, cully, if yer don't gimme away, I'll tell yer."

"Give you away? I ain't going to give you away. Why should I do such a thing?"

"I dunno; but some of the boys would do it if dey was in your place."

"Well, what's the secret?" demanded the other, impatiently.

"Jest dis," and the young man became more mysterious than ever. "I've got a little money—dat is, me brudder has—an' I'd like ter invest it in dis biz."

The policy man laughed.

"You have already invested a good deal, Pete," he said. "Just keep on, and all your money and that of your brother will go."

"I understand dat as well as you do. But, dat isn't w'ot I want. W'ot I want is to invest on de udder side o' de counter."

"You don't imagine that the old man would think of taking in a partner, do you?"

"Not dat, exactly. But, dere's a whole heaps o' towns up de river where it would pay to start shops, an' w'ot I proposed ter put to de old man was a scheme to invest money and start shops up along de Hudson. W'ot d'ye t'ink?"

"I don't think much of it."

"W'ot d'ye t'ink de old man'll t'ink of it?"

"If he had thought anything of the scheme he would have been in it long ago."

"If he'd 'a' t'ought of it."

"Oh, he would have thought of it. There is nothing with money in it that misses him. Still, it will do no harm to speak to him—if you can find him."

"Dat's jest de trouble. Where am I to find him?"

"At his house, most likely, if he isn't about any of the shops," replied the other dryly. "You know where he lives, don't you?"

"Yes, I know where he lives, but you know as well as I do dat he's never dere."

With that he strolled leisurely out of the place.

It was one of the up-town places.

The boss's residence was in West End avenue, not far from Eighty-third street, and consequently not far from the alleged cigar store in Columbus avenue.

Ned had a short while previously visited a place in Third avenue, and had had to cross the Park to reach this one.

As he stepped upon the sidewalk he was joined by another young man who had served as his guide for some days past, having formerly been connected with the game, and being, in fact, a relative of the boss. His name was Herbert Crosby.

When Ned rejoined him he was looking across the street at some object in which he was so much interested that he did not heed the request of his companion, the young detective, to come on.

Ned, following the direction of his gaze, saw a man standing on the opposite side of the street.

He then understood why the other had been interested.

They had seen the same individual on leaving the shop in Third avenue and knew that he had followed them.

"What do you think of him, Ned?" inquired his companion.

"A spy," was the rejoinder.

"That is what I think. What shall we do?"

"Do?" answered Ned. "We can do nothing, but just let him spy. It won't do him any good to spy."

"It may, and it may do us some harm."

"There is one thing we can do with him."

"What is that?"

"Lead him astray."

"That wouldn't be a bad idea. But I

thought you wanted to go to the boss's house?"

"So I do; but that can be postponed till we give this fellow the slip. Do you know him?"

"No, I never saw him before. He is evidently some new man the boss has got."

"Well, here is our chance. Here comes a horse car. Let us board it. From the distance he is away he will hardly catch the same car, and we will be able to easily give him the slip, I think."

By this time the car, which was going down-town, arrived opposite to where they stood and, without waiting to stop it, they hurried into the middle of the street and jumped aboard.

As they did so, they glanced back at their supposed shadower, and, to their surprise, he was not only making no effort to catch the car, but was gazing indifferently off in another direction.

Ned glanced inquiringly at his companion, and the latter shook his head.

"We must have been mistaken after all," suggested the young detective. "He apparently was not following us at all."

"Apparently not; and still you cannot tell. It is sometimes the policy of these spies to do that sort of thing for the purpose of throwing you off the track. He doubtless saw that we had got on to him, and he considered it time to play us a little game."

By this time the car had descended the hill below Fifty-sixth street.

"Well, we may as well get off," suggested Ned, "and take the next car back."

With that he jumped from the car, and was followed by his companion.

A moment later, another car, going up-town came along, and they jumped aboard of it.

In a few minutes they were back to the place where they had seen the spy standing, but he was no longer there.

"It would be a good joke on that fellow if he had taken the next car following the one we were on, expecting to overtake us," laughed Ned.

"That is probably what he has done. But if he has, he has seen us coming back by this car, you can bet. Those fellows are not to be caught napping."

The two young men continued on up to Eighty-third street, where they left the car and proceeded toward the west side.

It was after sundown and growing dusk when they reached the residence of the boss policy man, and Ned had selected this time of day on purpose as the most likely time in which to find him at home.

"You had better ring the bell and ask for your uncle, Herbert," suggested Ned. "If I do it he won't be at home."

"There isn't much more chance of his being at home if I ask for him," rejoined Herbert. "The old man isn't stuck on me, you know, and he always imagines I'm after dust when I call on him."

"Well, there will be no harm in trying."

"No, there will be no harm in trying."

With that Herbert ascended the steps and rung the bell.

A moment later a servant opened the door. "Is Mr. Banks at home?" inquired Herbert.

"There's nobody of that name here," replied the attendant, who had evidently had his instructions.

"That's funny," smiled the young man. "He did live here yesterday."

"Well, he don't live here now," growled the servant, and was about to shut the door in his face, when Herbert stopped him by saying:

"Look here, my good man. 'I guess you don't know who I am, do you?'"

"No, and I don't care," snapped the other.

"I'm Mr. Banks's neph—"

But at this point the door closed with a bang, cutting off the last syllable.

Herbert walked down the steps with a disgusted countenance.

"I'll get even with that fellow for that, if it takes me the rest of my life!" he growled. "It's bad enough to be kicked out by my uncle, much less to have the door shut in my face by one of his insolent flunkies. I'll never rest, now, till I see the old man behind the bars!"

"There is but one thing for us to do

now," murmured Ned as they walked away.

"What is that?"

"Watch for him, and when we see him go in, follow him. They will not have the cheek to tell us he is not in, then."

They walked away some distance, but not so far as to lose sight of the house.

At this point the street runs close to the bluff which overhangs the Hudson, and is lined on the river side by a mass of rough rocks.

The young men took a seat on the edge of these rocks and waited.

It rapidly grew dark, but, a brilliant street light threw its rays close to the stoop of Banks's house, and they knew there would be no trouble in seeing any one who might enter the residence.

It must have been nearly eight o'clock, and they had about given up the idea of seeing their man that night, when a large, portly man came walking briskly along and turned toward the stoop.

"There he is!" cried Herbert, enthusiastically.

"Come on!" exclaimed Ned, starting up. "I'll arrest him before he gets inside!"

CHAPTER II.

EASIER SAID THAN DONE.

As the young detective spoke, he made a dash with the view to crossing the street to where the great policy shop owner was, but at that moment a team came tearing by at a furious gait, compelling him to pause.

This was exasperating, for while he was being forced to stand idle waiting for the team to get past, he could see his man quietly ascending his steps.

And by the time he was able to resume his progress Banks had entered the house and closed the door behind him.

But it did not take Ned long to follow.

Not more than the fraction of a minute elapsed from the time the door closed before he was at the bell and ringing it furiously.

The same attendant who had shut the door in Herbert's face a little while before now opened it to Ned.

Whether it was because he had seen him with Herbert, and recognized him, or ringing the bell with such vigor, the servant scowled at the detective and growled ill-naturedly:

"Well, what is it?"

"I want to see Mr. Banks," answered Ned.

"Well, you can't see him," growled the servant.

"Why not?"

"Because he is not here."

"But I happen to know that he is!"

The fellow laughed.

"You are very smart," he said. "You know more than I do, for I know that he is not here, nor anybody of that name."

"Do you mean to tell me that he does not live here?"

"That is what I tell you. There is no one here by that name."

Ned was nonplused, and while he cudgelled his brain for an answer he cast his eyes about the vestibule where he stood, and at last they fell upon the door-plate.

This would solve the problem, he thought, and he stooped over to read the name, which was partly in shadow.

The servant watched him curiously.

Finally he succeeded in making it out, and was more puzzled than ever, for it was not the name of Banks at all, but Bailey.

The servant saw his perplexity and laughed.

"Now you see that you are mistaken?" he said.

"It is not the same name," he admitted.

"Nevertheless, I saw him enter this house not a minute ago."

"Who?"

"Banks."

"I beg your pardon, but nobody came in here within the last half hour, except Mr. Bailey."

An idea occurred to the detective.

"May I see Mr. Bailey, then?" he asked.

"I will see," replied the servant, and withdrew.

Two minutes later he returned with the announcement that the gentleman was in his

bath and could not be seen, and Ned was compelled to turn away disappointed and disgusted. He was also angry, and for two reasons:

One at being defeated in his purpose, and the other at Herbert, whom he half believed to be guilty of betraying him.

"Well, it is evident you are mistaken about that being the residence of Edward Banks," he growled as he rejoined his companion on the opposite side of the street.

He was about to say that he had steered him wrong intentionally, but checked himself in time.

Herbert divined his suspicion, however, and gazed at him with an injured expression.

"Why don't you out with it at once, old man, and say that you believe I have put you on the wrong scent?" interposed Herbert. "That is what you think, and you may as well out with it at once, so that we may understand each other."

This had the effect of making Ned feel a little ashamed at having suspected his friend, but he could not help saying:

"I don't say that you knew better, but as this is not the residence of your uncle, it seems as if you ought to have known it."

"If it was not his house, I surely would know it," retorted Herbert warmly, "but it is."

"You still persist in saying that it is?"

"Certainly. Why shouldn't I, when I know what I am talking about?"

"Then how do you account for the fact that there is another name on the door-plate?"

Herbert laughed.

"When you know that man as well as I do," he replied, "you won't wonder at any little thing like that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that he is liable to change that door-plate every day in the week if he finds it necessary to insure his safety."

Ned thought there might be some truth in the statement, and yet he was far from satisfied.

What puzzled him most, was the fact that under the circumstances it was going to be next to impossible to catch his man.

First of all, it would be difficult to connect him, positively, with the numerous policy-shops of which he (the detective) knew him to be the owner, and when that was done, if it ever was, the question would still be—how to catch the man.

One thing was in his favor now, however. He had seen the man, and could identify him anywhere he might meet him.

Ned had remained silent for some moments while these reflections were passing through his mind, and had become almost oblivious to his surroundings, when Herbert suddenly brought him to his senses by a nudge.

Ned turned, half angrily, to ascertain the cause of the action, and saw his companion pointing at some object across the street.

Following the direction, the young detective was surprised and chagrined to see the identical man who he had twice seen before and whom he now felt satisfied was following him.

The discovery exasperated him more than his disappointment in not being able to see Banks had done.

The fellow was standing within a few feet of the stoop of the house which Ned had just left and must have seen him ascend the stoop and ring the bell, as well as seeing and hearing all that went on between himself and the footman.

Ned was angry with himself now that he should have been so blind or stupid as not to have seen him.

"I'll just cross over and speak to him," he said. "I shall see what he means by following me wherever I go."

"I don't think it will do you any good," remarked Herbert.

"Why not?"

"I know the methods of these fellows pretty well, and I don't believe you will get any satisfaction out of him. It is their policy to keep mum, and they can do it to perfection."

Ned could not but notice that the fellow appeared, as he had on the last occasion of his seeing him, to take no interest in his (the detective's) movements whatever. In

fact, he was looking off in another direction at that moment.

Nevertheless, Ned determined to have a talk with him and, if possible, compel him to explain what he meant by dogging his steps.

He strode resolutely across the street and walked up to within a few feet of his man, who very quietly turned his back on him.

This provoked the detective still more, and he was more than ever determined to have it out with him.

First he cleared his throat to make the fellow aware of his presence, but, as he still paid no attention to him, he spoke.

"I say!" he called out.

Still the fellow did not move.

He then took a step and placed himself on the opposite side of him so that he could not help seeing him.

But the fellow coolly turned his back upon him once more and appeared to suddenly find something of absorbing interest on the opposite side of the street.

Ned was furious.

He was determined now not to be outdone, whatever it might cost.

"Look here, fellow!" he called out in a loud voice. "I'm talking to you! Do you hear? I say! I'm addressing you, sir! Are you deaf, or merely an idiot?"

But it was no use. The fellow never moved a muscle.

Ned began to think that he was either deaf and dumb or an absolute imbecile, but would know whether he was or not, and so touched him rather rudely on the arm, at the same time repeating his address of "I say!"

The man turned slowly and gazed calmly at him, but did not open his lips.

"Well, sir, what have you to say for yourself?" demanded Ned, wrathfully. "What do you mean by following me wherever I go, sir?"

Ned thought that about plain and insulting enough, if the fellow had any pride or dignity about him, but, to his surprise, the stranger made no response whatever, and, after staring at the detective for an instant, turned and walked calmly away.

Ned stood watching him for some moments; then he turned away, intending to rejoin Herbert, but, as he did so he came face to face with that young man.

Herbert was laughing heartily, and it irritated Ned for a moment, but he soon joined him.

"Well, what did you find out?" queried Herbert. "Fine conversationalist, isn't he?"

"Splendid. I never saw anything like him. I was never so much interested in anybody in my life. My only regret is that he hadn't time to favor me with more of his brilliant talk."

"Well, that is about what I expected when you crossed over to speak to him. These spies make a point of doing that sort of thing. If he had answered a single question it might have betrayed some secret which he desires to guard with his life, so they make it a point to say nothing."

"He plays his part well, but I'll bet a dollar that I'll make him talk before I am done with him."

"When you do," laughed Herbert, "it will be when you have the old man in the toils."

"Yes, and I'll accomplish that before you are aware of it."

"I hope so, and shall do all in my power to assist you in that direction. But, which way now?"

"I hardly know. I was thinking some of waiting about here with the hope of seeing Banks come out again, but I don't know as it will be worth while. What do you think?"

"I know it won't be worth while," rejoined Herbert. "He knows that somebody is watching for him, and if he comes out tonight, it won't be through the front way."

"What would you suggest, then?"

"That we go down to the Bleecker street place. That, you know, is virtually the headquarters, and he usually calls there some time during the evening to gather in the profits which come in from the various other joints."

"Very well; we will go there," answered Ned.

And a moment later they were walking toward Columbus avenue again.

Here they took a down-town Elevated

train, and twenty minutes later, got off at Bleecker street. A walk of only half a block toward the west side of the city was necessary, as the shop in question was located between South Fifth avenue and Thompson street, in the very heart of the negro settlement.

The place, like most of the others, was to all appearances a cigar store, although the scanty stock inside the dirty show case had the appearance of having been undisturbed for many a day.

A crowd of dirty and vicious-looking negroes, men, women and children swarmed about the doorway, most of them discussing "gigs," "straddles," "horses" and "combinations."

There were also a few inside exchanging their pennies for checks, but when Ned entered business was suddenly suspended.

However, when he slouched up to the counter with a swagger, threw down a dollar bill and asked for a "gig," the fellow behind the counter pretended not to understand him, opened the showcase and asked:

"Medium or strong?"

Ned chuckled and winked significantly.

"Say, youse is dead slick, ain't yer?" he growled. "W'ot d'er take me fer—a gilly? D'yer t'ink I want ter pass in me chips right er way, er is it slow p'izen yer propose ter gimme? I want er cat gig, dat's w'ot I want. I got er dead sure winner; see?"

The writer, who was a low-browed, heavy-jawed individual, stared at the detective for a moment, and finally came to the conclusion, apparently, that it was all right, for he said:

"Scuse me. I didn't tumble at furst. W'ot d'ye say yer want?"

"A cat gig, 4-48-49. I got er dead sure t'ing on dat."

"How d'yer know?"

"'Cause de furs t'ing I see dis mornin' was er spotted cat wid her tail over her back, and mowin' like blazes."

"Yer don't say!"

The writer was thoroughly interested now. The sign alluded to by Ned is considered by habitual policy players to be next to infallible, and they will stake their last cent on it.

"Dat's right," replied Ned, with a grin, as he pocketed his ticket.

"I wonder yer didn't play it earlier."

"Didn't have de mun; see?"

At that moment there was a shrill whistle outside, and before Ned and his companion were aware of it they were surrounded by a gang of toughs who apparently thirsted for their blood.

CHAPTER III.

IN FOR IT.

As soon as Ned heard the whistle he knew it was a signal and realized that he and his partner were in for it.

The only mystery was, who had given the signal?

But at present they had all they could do to think of getting out of the dilemma.

Every instant added to their peril.

In less than a minute after the signal had been given the place was packed with a surging, eager mob of ruffians, black and white, each one of whom appeared anxious to get at the intruders.

Pistols, knives, clubs, razors and every conceivable kind of weapon were being brandished above the heads of the yelling, struggling mob.

Meanwhile Ned and Herbert had backed up against the counter, so that their assailants could not attack them from behind, and drawing their revolvers, stood on the defensive.

Thus far the crowd had only threatened; none appeared sufficiently courageous to advance upon the stern and resolute young men.

But they kept up a terrific yelling.

"Kill de informers! Cut the throat out o' the blamed beaks! Let me at 'em wif dis razor jes' onst!" and similar threats and exclamations arose on every side.

And amid it all the two brave young men never winced nor quaked in the least.

But soon the pressure became so great from the door that those nearest Ned and his companion were gradually forced forward nearer and nearer to them, and it seemed only

a matter of time when the crowd would be thrust plump against them.

What the consequences would be in such an event was difficult to imagine.

Experience had taught both of them that in a case of this kind it only wants a "starter," as they say, when the whole pack would be upon them.

Therefore, they were anxious to prevent anything of the kind, as long as possible, hoping that the police might be warned in time to help them out of their difficulty.

But, unfortunately, they were not to have any such good luck.

As the pushing at the door continued, one of those in front was at last hurled forward with such violence that he came in collision with Ned's pistol and discharged it.

As it happened no one was hurt by the discharge, but it had the effect of inciting the mob to action.

"Oh, dat's yer game, is it?" yelled half a dozen voices at once, and as many pistols were discharged in their direction.

But the crowd was too closely packed about them to permit any of the bullets to strike them, and what was a greater wonder, none of the crowd was hit.

But just at that moment a burly giant of a negro pushed his way through the crowd till he came face to face with the young men, and began to slash at Ned's face with a razor.

Before he had made any slashes, however, Herbert, who was an expert boxer, landed a terrific blow on the negro's arm, which sent the razor spinning in the air.

This had the effect of infuriating the brute more than ever, and he made a lunge at Herbert's head with his clinched fist.

But he was not quick enough in his action.

Herbert easily dodged the blow, and before the negro could recover Ned had landed him one under the jaw, which sent him reeling to the floor.

This was enough for the mob. All they wanted was for the fight to be commenced, and they were upon the two intruders like so many maddened bulls.

They did not make much progress for awhile, however, as both young men were experts in that line and hard hitters, and many of the oncoming mob went down under their rapid, sledge-hammer blows.

But it could not last long; the numbers were too great, and as fast as one was felled in front of them, his place was instantly filled by another.

It was only a matter of time, therefore, when they must succumb to superior numbers.

The crowd was too near to use pistols, but they made good use of them, nevertheless, by clubbing them and using them as slung shots.

In this way they managed to keep the ruffians back for a time, but they soon began to crowd on so vigorously and fight so furiously, that all hope seemed to be at an end, and the two young men must soon yield to overwhelming odds.

Still they fought with the strength of desperation, and still managed to hold their own.

At length, however, a burly fellow—a perfect giant—strode up in front of them and began to shower his sledge-hammer blows upon first one and then the other.

They both saw at once that they were no match for him, even had they had him alone to contend with, and Ned was seriously contemplating attempting to use his revolver, when something occurred to change the whole nature of affairs.

A second shrill whistle that sounded clear above the din of the fight was heard, and that instant every man stopped struggling and stood as still as if he had been suddenly frozen in that position.

Ned was at a loss to understand it, but Herbert knew the meaning.

Every one had turned, and all eyes were fixed upon somebody or something in the neighborhood of the door.

A breathless silence reigned for a full minute, and then some one whispered:

"The boss."

The word passed about the room like a dread alarm, and then another silence followed, but it only lasted for an instant, and then came a deep, sonorous voice, saying:

"What is all this row about? Do you

want to bring the police in upon us? Clear out of here, every one of you!"

That was sufficient; in another instant the crowd began to ooze out of the door as rapidly as it had forced itself in a few moments before.

While this was going on Herbert leaned over and whispered to Ned:

"That's the boss. See what a power he has over these ruffians."

Nearly all of the crowd had got out of the door, when some one plucked up sufficient courage to say to the new-comer:

"There's a couple of spies in there, boss."

Banks was standing in the door in full view of the two comrades by this time, and he cast his eyes about the now nearly empty room.

"Where?" he finally asked.

"Over there," came the response, and, as the speaker uttered the words, he arose on the door-step in order to see the so-called spies, and they saw that it was the very man whom they had seen on three different occasions!

He pointed his finger in the direction of Ned and his companion, and said:

"There."

Banks glanced over at the two young men with an unconcerned air, shrugged his shoulders, and answered:

"You're mistaken, Burke," and, without another word he walked across the room and disappeared into a back room.

Again Ned was in a quandary.

He knew that it would be worse than folly to attempt to follow the boss into his den, as there was no telling how many assistants he might have about him there; besides if he were to arrest him there, it would be impossible to get him out in the face of the mob that loitered outside, and were only too anxious to finish the fight which they had been beaten out of.

Ned was not long in making up his mind what to do under the circumstances.

He was possessed of sufficient proof now to warrant him in making the arrest at any time or in any place, and he would bide his time.

There was no longer any doubt about him being the proprietor of the various policy shops about the city, most of which the detective had visited and in one way or another elicited the confession from the managers that Banks was the "boss."

The only question that puzzled him now was how he was to get out of the place without another collision with the mob outside.

"We've got to get out of here," he observed, addressing his companion. "But the question is, how are we going to do it?"

"I see but one way," answered Herbert.

"How is that?"

"Is there no way that we can disguise ourselves?"

"I can soon disguise myself," returned Ned. "But how about yourself?"

"Never mind me. I'll take care of myself."

"Very well, then. Here goes."

And in an instant Ned had removed his coat and turning it inside out, put it on again. He also turned his slouch hat inside out, and, stepping over to the stove, rubbed his hands full of soot and rubbed it over his face.

This changed his appearance so much that no one would have known him, and when he turned for Herbert's approval that young man was astonished at the metamorphosis. But not more so than he was at the change that had taken place in Herbert's own appearance.

The latter had brought forth an old calico dress which he had had concealed about him somewhere and put it on, and followed the action by tying a red cotton handkerchief about his head. He had also smeared his face with soot, so that he had the appearance of a very tough looking negress.

Ned laughed at his partner's ingenuity, and said:

"You'll do, old fellow. I thought I was something on extemporaneous making up, but you are an artist. Where did you make the raise of the dress?"

"It's one I picked up at the last joint we were in. I didn't know but it might come in handy some time."

It was fortunate that no one was in the

room at the time, the attendants of the place having followed the boss into the back room when he went. But at this moment some of the crowd outside, who had lost patience in waiting for the boys to come out, began to peep in at the door. But, fortunately, they did not recognize the young detectives, in their disguise.

A moment later they walked boldly forth and there was not one in all the mob that recognized them.

As it was very dark in the street at this point they were congratulating themselves on their lucky escape from the murderous mob, but they had got but a little way when that warning whistle broke upon the stillness of the night, and the next instant the whole pack made after them.

There was nothing for it but to give them leg-bail now, and the two young men took to their heels and ran as fast as they were able.

A short run brought them to South Fifth avenue, and as there was a station of the Elevated Road there, they hastened up the steps.

The mob followed them no further than the foot of the steps and seeing that they were foiled, turned back and scattered away.

The detective and his friend took the train as far as the next station up-town, which was Eighth street, and here they alighted and took a cross-town car, and a little while afterward were at Police Headquarters.

Luckily Superintendent Byrnes was still in his office, and Ned reported the progress he had made, and gave the locations of the various policy shops, with the recommendation that all be pulled that night.

"This will narrow my work down considerably," he suggested, "as there will not be so many hiding-places for the men I am after."

The superintendent acted upon his suggestion, and before morning every shop known to exist was closed by the police and the inmates locked up.

Ned then thought that his task was about at an end, as he only had to find Banks and serve the warrant on him, and the following day at about the same hour that he had called the previous day he went to the residence in West End avenue.

This time he had attired himself in a neat suit of clothes so that any one seeing him the day before would not have recognized him now as the same person.

He rung the bell and when the servant appeared he asked the same question:

"Is Mr. Banks in?"

To his surprise the answer was in the affirmative, and what astonished him still more was that the servant added:

"And I believe he wants to see you."

"Wants to see me?" queried Ned.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "You are the same young gentleman who was here yesterday, are you not?"

This was a poser.

Of course he had no notion of answering the question affirmatively, but what puzzled him was, first, how the servant knew that he was the same person, and second, what Banks wanted to see him for. One thing of which he was quite certain, though, and that was that it was for no good to himself that the king of policy wanted to see him.

However, he was no coward, and, although he was alone to day, he determined to go in and see what the boss wanted with him, believing that he was a match for him at any rate.

So, simply nodding in answer to the servant's last question, he entered the lion's den.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE LION'S DEN.

NED was naturally a little nervous on entering the house of this notorious man and, although he had never heard of his committing any worse crime than running a policy shop—or rather half a hundred of them—he could not but believe that his present object was to draw the detective into a trap.

He was shown into the parlor, which was a miracle of gorgeous furnishing, although it was so dimly lighted with the wax candles that he only had a faint view of his surroundings.

But he could see that the furnishings must be those of a very rich person, and he could not help but think of the poor, ignorant creatures whose pennies had gone to make up this man's immense wealth.

Meanwhile he was alone in the great drawing-room, awaiting the arrival of the boss, who, the servant said, would be down in a few minutes.

Presently he heard footsteps, but when the young detective looked up, expecting to see the great policy man, he was disappointed, for it was a woman.

She did not appear to be more than eighteen, and, while not particularly handsome, she possessed a pair of exceedingly black, brilliant eyes and a bright, interesting face, which rendered her more fascinating than mere beauty would have done.

She was elegantly dressed, and as she sunk into a chair near the detective, and began conversation, he could not help seeing that she was educated and accomplished.

"Papa will be down in a moment," she began, "and I thought I would run in and entertain you until he comes."

Ned was more bewildered now than ever.

It was surprise enough to know that this accomplished girl was the daughter of the notorious blackleg, and he wondered how the boss could face such a family after mingling with the wretched mob he had met at the various policy shops. But the greatest cause for surprise was to know why this man and his family had taken such an interest in him.

He was well aware that detectives were not usually treated with such consideration, especially when they had come to arrest some of their entertainers, and he grew eager and impatient to know what the meaning of it all was.

In the mean time he tried to be as civil as possible to the young lady, who was herself extremely agreeable, although owing to the nature of his mission he could not help being a trifle embarrassed.

The girl chatted on gayly on various topics never in any way alluding to her father's business or inquiring the detective's.

Ned was becoming more and more mystified every minute, for he could not understand what motive the girl could have in conversing with him, unless it was to discover something about him and his business, and she was making no effort in this direction.

Interesting as the girl was, his anxiety to see the outcome of what he believed to be a plot of some kind, caused him to become impatient for the arrival of her father.

And he had not to wait long.

In a very short time a portly gentleman walked into the room, and Ned had no difficulty in recognizing him as the same that he had seen enter the house on the previous evening, and also disperse the mob at the Bleeker street policy shop.

He approached the detective with a bland smile and an outstretched hand, which Ned could not do otherwise than take.

"Good-evening, my young friend!" he exclaimed in a hearty voice. "I trust you are quite well?"

Ned stammered something to the effect that he was, but was too much embarrassed to say much.

He now remarked that Banks was a man of probably fifty, remarkably well preserved like a man who had taken life easy and had had very little worry. He was a very handsome and apparently well-bred man, and at present was attired in a full evening dress.

"I hope I haven't kept you waiting unreasonably long," continued the policy king, still holding the young man's hand. "I had some little matters to attend to when you came, or I should have been down sooner. You want to see me on private business, I believe?"

More embarrassed than ever, Ned managed to falter something to the effect that he did, to which the boss answered:

"Come along, then. We will go to my private office up-stairs. Stella, please excuse us. This young gentleman wishes to see me on confidential business."

"With pleasure, papa," replied the girl, "although I am loth to lose the young gentleman's company, for I assure you he is a most delightful entertainer."

This Ned knew to be rank flattery, for he

had scarcely opened his mouth, leaving her to do all the talking.

He bowed politely to the young lady, however, and followed her father, although he firmly believed he was going to his own destruction.

But such was the old gentleman's politeness and suavity that he could not find courage to resist him, although he strove hard to make some excuse for not going up-stairs, and even contemplated stopping on several occasions and refusing to go further.

But he would no more than frame the excuse, when the other would interject some courteous remark which caused his firmness to melt away like frost in the sunshine.

When they reached the private office, which was furnished with a degree of sumptuousness corresponding with the rooms, Ned had already seen, the boss motioned the detective to a seat and sat down facing him.

Ned was very nervous by this time.

Had his polite host presented a pistol to his head on reaching the room or called upon a crowd of ruffians to take him in charge, he would not have been surprised, and would have known how to meet them, but when he found that his conduct was still that of the greatest politeness and cordiality, he was at a loss what to do.

"You wanted to see me, so the boys tell me," began Banks, "with regard to investing money in the business in which I am engaged and out of which I have grown rich. This was a very clever subterfuge on your part, for, of course it was only a blind. Your real motive was that which brought you here this evening—to get a chance to see and arrest me. Am I not right?"

Although greatly embarrassed by the man's frankness, Ned put on as bold a face as possible, and replied:

"Yes. The fact is—"

"I understand," interrupted the other, as he saw the detective place his hand in the vicinity of his breast pocket. "It is not necessary for you to tell me that you have a warrant for me. I know it. But, what I was about to remark was with regard to your plan to secure an interview with me."

"It was very clever, from your point of view, although it would never have worked with me, for the fact that money is no object to me. I go on the principle that dead men tell no tales, or what is the same thing, to share your secrets with no one, and they will never be divulged."

"Your partner, be he ever so loyal and honorable, is liable to betray you, unintentionally, perhaps, but betray you just the same. So you see, your scheme would have proven a failure, so far as securing an interview with me is concerned. Hundreds of detectives have planned to catch me napping, but in vain. You are the first one whom I have allowed to come into my presence, and I have permitted you for two reasons."

"First, I like your appearance; and second, I can see that you are not wanting in true bravery, otherwise you would not have come into my trap so readily. But, let us come to the point. Now that you are here, what do you propose to do?"

"Well, as you admit that I am in your trap," answered Ned, with the utmost coolness, "I presume I can do nothing. I have a warrant for your arrest, of course, but it is useless so long as I am in your power. I shall have to await a more favorable opportunity, I presume."

"You will never have a more favorable opportunity than you have at this moment, my young friend. But what do you mean by saying that you are in my power?"

"Why, you yourself have just said that I was in your trap. By this I infer that you have plenty of help concealed about here somewhere, and if I should attempt to enforce the authority invested in me, you would instantly bring a pack of ruffians—"

"Stop!" cried the boss, jumping to his feet, and for the first time evincing something approaching anger. "I would have you know that ruffians are never permitted in my house. My dealings with them are confined to my business. When I enter this house—the home of my wife and child—I wash my hands of all of them."

"I ask your pardon for using the word 'ruffian,'" interposed Ned. "I meant no disrespect to you or your family, but I natu-

rally supposed that the guards, or whatever you choose to call them, were men of that stamp. I judged—"

"From what you saw at my place of business," interrupted Banks, resuming his seat and growing affable again. "I understand; and the mistake was perfectly natural. But, let me tell you that I have neither ruffians nor anybody else, except servants, about the house, and I should not think of calling upon them for assistance in a case of this kind. Moreover, when I used the word trap, I did not mean you should infer that I contemplated using any violence, or that you would be restrained from departing at any time you choose to go. What I wished to impress upon you was the fact that once you were admitted to my presence, and made my acquaintance, and gained my friendship, as you have done, you would be as powerless to exercise your authority, as if your hands were tied behind your back."

Ned already realized too well the truth of this observation.

He had only been in this man's presence a few minutes, and yet he felt himself drawn toward him by some invisible bond which he could no more resist than if he had been an infant in the hands of a giant.

He no longer had any desire to serve the warrant which he had in his pocket, and, what was stranger still, he had no desire to leave the place.

Moreover, his nervousness had left him and a feeling of contentment had come over him, such as he could not have believed possible, and he felt at that moment that so far from attempting to arrest this man, he would rather take sides with him against all persecutors.

Ned was silent and thoughtful, and after a short pause Banks went on:

"Now, to show you how little prepared I am to resist you in the event of your desiring to serve your warrant, I ask—invite you to serve your warrant, arrest me and take me to the police station. I shall offer no resistance. Come! Much depends on your action to-night. You are intrusted by your superiors with an important charge. Your reputation as a detective hangs upon the fulfillment of it. It will be a feather in your cap to arrest and bring to justice the notorious Edward Banks. Your fame will be heralded throughout the world. You will stand at the head of your profession, for some of the best of them have attempted it and failed. Come," he continued, holding out his hands. "Put the irons on me. I am ready to go with you."

But Ned did not, could not move.

He would as soon have thought of handcuffing his best friend whom he knew to be innocent of any crime, as this man whom he knew to be guilty of thousands.

He could not understand it, and did not attempt to understand it.

He only knew that a feeling of the warmest friendship for this man had sprung up in his heart, and all his habitual sternness and indifference of sentiment had forsaken him.

"Then you will not arrest me?" cried Banks, approaching Ned and grasping his hands warmly. "Why do you hesitate?"

"Yes, I refuse to arrest you," came the firm declination of the young man. "I cannot."

"Why can you not? Are you afraid?"

"No, I have no fear. I have no fear of anything or anybody. I should not quake or lose my courage if you brought a thousand men against me, but I cannot arrest you. Do not ask me why. All that I can say is, that I cannot."

"You tell the truth when you say that you have no fear. I saw that when you were surrounded by the mob in Bleeker street, and now I'll tell you why you do not, cannot arrest me. It is because you love me—as I do you. You are my warmest friend, and if there is anything in this world that I can do for you, you only need to ask for it, and it will be that instant granted."

CHAPTER V.

STERNER STUFF IN THE FIELD.

A WEEK, two weeks went by after Ned Preston had been known to have entered the house of the great policy king, and nothing more had been heard of him.

Superintendent Byrnes had waited patiently day after day for a report from the faithful young detective, but nothing came.

As time wore on and no tidings were received from him, the superintendent began to first grow impatient, and then half angry at what he supposed to be neglect of duty on the part of one who had never been delinquent before.

Finally, losing all patience, he ordered an investigation, and then it came out that the young man had been known to go to the boss's house for the purpose of serving the warrant upon him, and had never been seen afterward.

Concluding at once that the young detective had met with foul play, the superintendent ordered a thorough search to be made, which included a search of the house into which he had been known to enter.

Armed with the proper documents, a squad of policemen repaired to the house and demanded the surrender of the young detective!

They were met by one of the well-trained servants, who coldly informed them that not only had the person in question never been there, but that he knew nothing of any one by the name of Banks.

With this the sergeant in command of the squad demanded permission to search the premises, which was readily and politely granted, and a thorough search followed.

But to no purpose.

Not only was Ned not found, but no trace of Banks was discovered nor anything to indicate that such a man lived there.

The police were nonplused.

It was decided that one of two things had occurred. Either that Ned had met with foul play, or that he had been bought off and sent away out of reach of the police.

Byrnes was loth to believe the latter of the young man in whom he had placed the greatest confidence.

He believed that he had met with foul play, and determined to sift the matter to bottom, let it cost what it might.

His first move was to put the house under the surveillance of the police, who had orders to allow no one to go or come without their knowledge and consent.

His next move was to send for his old and tried friend and stand-by, Thaddeus Burr, a detective who had never been known to fail in any case he had undertaken.

The great detective had been taking a short rest, and it was with some compunction that the superintendent called upon him to resume active duty again, when he knew how much in need he was of the brief respite he was taking.

"I am awfully sorry to have to call upon you so soon after what you have recently gone through, Thad," began Byrnes when Burr entered his office in response to his summons, "but I don't see how I am to help myself this time."

"Why, what's in the wind now, superintendent?" asked the detective, as he sunk wearily into a seat. "Another mystery that proves too much for the boys?"

"That's it exactly," replied Byrnes gravely. "A mystery that baffles the best of us."

"What is it, another mysterious murder?"

"That we cannot tell. I fear it may turn out that, though I hope it may not prove so bad."

He then proceeded to relate the account of the detailing of the young detective on the case of the policy dealers, of his success in tracing the case to a certain point, and finally of Ned's going to the house of the proprietor of all the lay-outs in the city with a warrant for his arrest, and his sudden and mysterious disappearance.

"He seems to have dropped as completely out of existence as if the earth had suddenly opened and swallowed him," observed the superintendent in conclusion. "I don't know what to make of it."

"You don't think it possible that the young man has been tempted by this keen rascal's money to abandon the case and slip away somewhere, do you?" questioned Thad cautiously.

"I dislike to believe that, Thad, although there is a possibility of it. Ned was a very young man, and if this fellow has taken it into his head to bribe him with a large sum of money, which he could easily afford to do, it is barely possible that Ned Preston

has been unable to resist the temptation. What do you think of it?"

Thad did not answer at once, but sat staring into space and ruminating thoughtfully on the subject.

"You say he went to the house of the notorious Edward Banks with a warrant for his arrest?—went alone?"

"Unfortunately, yes. If I had known of his intention I should not have permitted such a thing. He should have had a strong escort."

"Which would probably have been of no use to him," observed Thad thoughtfully.

"How so?"

"In such a case he would have met the same reception as the police whom you say you have sent to investigate; he would have found no Edward Banks."

"Which would have been all the better for Ned."

"As it turns out, yes. Still, the young man's plan was all right. Now let me tell you my theory of the case."

"I am only too anxious to hear it, old man."

"I know something of this man Banks, and I do not believe he would be guilty of offering violence to any one, except as a last resort, especially if the party happened to be a defenseless guest in his own house."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; if there is one thing in which this man excels aside from being the most successful swindler in the country, it is that of a perfect gentleman in the sense of not taking advantage of a defenseless enemy. Nor do I believe he has bribed the young man. He is too sharp for that. He knows too well that he could never trust the man who would accept his money to keep faith with him."

"What is your theory, then, as to what has become of Ned?" asked the superintendent eagerly.

Thad reflected again for some time, and finally said:

"This man Banks is a wonderful man in many ways. You are aware of the manner in which he controls the army of toughs whom he has in his power?"

"Yes, I have long since had reason to notice that fact."

"And doubtless wondered how he could keep them all in line, being as they are, made up of some of the most unprincipled characters in the city?"

"I have, I have wondered at it a good many times."

"In all the years since he has been known to control the policy business of the city you have not known one of his henchmen to peach on him, have you?"

"Never."

"Did you ever try to divine the cause?"

"Yes, and the only solution I could arrive at was that he either treated them exceedingly well, or that he made them fear him as they might fear the Old Boy himself."

"Neither theory is the correct one."

"No?"

"No. He treats them fairly well, so far as pay is concerned, but otherwise they are treated as so many slaves unworthy of his notice. But, while he treats them with this contempt, he is never unkind to them, and will never see one of them in trouble. As a result, there is not one among the gang who would not lay down his life for the 'boss' as they call him."

"This is very strange, and explains the phenomenon of his power over them, and his success in flogging the police all these years; but still it does not explain what he has done with Ned."

"I think it does, fully."

"How so?"

"Well, let us suppose the case. Let us imagine we see the young detective going to this man's house alone, armed with a warrant for his arrest, and full of confidence in his success."

"Well?"

"Well, being alone, the next thing to powerless, he is admitted to the presence of the great policy king without question. The sly old dog pretends to have taken a violent fancy to the young detective, flatters him out of his senses, and, winds up with completely capturing his affections, as he does with everybody who comes into his presence. The young man thereupon finds himself in-

capable of enforcing the authority invested in him and arresting the old rascal. He therefore refuses to do it."

"But when he gets away from Banks, what then?"

"It makes no difference. Once in his power, he will always continue in his power, and although he may be ashamed of his weakness when he gets away, he can never find it in his heart to return and attempt to arrest his dear kind hearted friend. He is also ashamed to return and report failure to Headquarters, so he remains away from here."

"This is most remarkable!" observed Byrnes, after a season of reflection. "But if your theory is correct, there is nothing to be done in Ned's case, it would seem."

"Yes; he may be found and disciplined for his weakness. There is also the boss to be captured."

"I should hardly feel like disciplining him if, as you say, every one falls a victim to this man's wiles. But, what do you propose, Thad?"

"With regard to the case?"

"Yes."

"I don't mind giving it a trial."

"In which you are sure to succeed."

"I shall do my best."

"That is all I can ask. Do you want any help?"

"Not for the present."

"You don't think there is any danger of your falling into the deadly snare of this bewitching man, do you?" laughed the superintendent.

"I hope not," replied Thad, joining in his merriment.

"Don't let the rascal get you in his power—I mean in the physical sense. As a last resort he might do something of the sort, you admit."

"Yes, if he could not carry his point in any other way, I have no doubt he might use violence. But, I shall try not to get into his power. You know I have gone through some pretty tough experiences, and always came out all right."

"So you have, Thad," admitted the superintendent, warmly, "and that is why I have called upon you to take hold of this case. I do not believe anybody else is capable of handling it but yourself."

Leaving the superintendent, Thad went home, and, sitting down in his private office, formulated his plan of action.

He knew that it would not be worth his while to call at Banks's house for the present, and it would be equally a waste of time to go to any of his numerous places of business, which were under the surveillance of the police, as well as his house, and there would be no chance of finding his man at either place.

He knew a good deal about the policy man's private life, and was aware that he had had a half-brother who was a gambler, and who had been shot during one of his games by another gambler. The detective likewise knew that this dead half-brother had left a son who was as much of a scape-grace as the father had been.

It was understood that the nephew, who had for a time been in the employ of Banks, had fallen out with him, and was at present his deadly enemy.

He did not know what the relations between the two brothers were, but at all events his first purpose was to hunt up the two men, nephew and brother, and see what could be learned through them.

He did not know where to find the nephew, but had the address of the lawyer; therefore he called there first.

Burr did not assume any disguise, but merely attired himself neatly, and, as the lawyer's office was in the lower part of the city, took a Ninth avenue Elevated train.

Once seated in the car he drew out a newspaper and became absorbed in its contents.

He had been thus engaged for some time when he became aware that not only was he being closely scrutinized by the two men in seats opposite to him, but that he was the subject of their not very confidential conversation.

As soon as he made this discovery the detective affected not to notice them, elevated his paper so as to conceal his face, and listened attentively.

"You must be mistaken," said one. "It can't be he."

"But, I know I am not mistaken," retorted the other sharply. "I cannot be mistaken in him. I knew him too well."

"It does not seem likely that he would come back here after that business."

"I wouldn't have believed it myself, but you know he always was a foolhardy cuss."

"I know; and he runs a good chance of being arrested, doesn't he?"

"I don't know about that. It seems to me that his folks fixed it up after he went away."

"Well," observed the first speaker, after a little silence, "if it is Howard Preston I'm going to speak to him."

"What for?" asked the other contemptuously. "I should do nothing of the kind."

"I shall. I want to satisfy myself as to whether it is he or not, because I am quite sure that it is not, otherwise he would have recognized us."

"He doubtless had an object in not recognizing us," said the other scornfully.

Curious to see the outcome of the affair, Thad gradually lowered his newspaper so that his neighbors could see his face, but still pretended not to notice them.

He had scarcely done so when the man who had declared his intention of speaking to him leaned forward and said:

"I say, Preston, old man, aren't you getting very stiff not to recognize an old friend?"

Thad looked up with well feigned surprise, and after surveying the speaker's countenance for a minute or so, replied:

"You have the advantage of me, sir. Your face is very familiar, but for the life of me I cannot recall your name."

"What, don't remember your old chum, Larry Wentworth?" exclaimed the other.

"Great Heaven! you don't mean to tell me—why, of course. Now that I look at you, there can be no doubt about it. But, how you have changed since I saw you! How are you, Larry?"

"First class," cried the other cordially, grasping the proffered hand. "You remember Tom, don't you?"

"Tom—Tom—?" mused the detective.

"Tom Deacon. Don't you remember?"

CHAPTER VI.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

THAD was in something of a quandary.

He knew that he had been mistaken for some one who was doubtless under a cloud of some kind, but who the person was or what he had done, he of course knew nothing.

Still, partly out of curiosity and partly in the hope that something in his line might grow out of the mistake, he determined to keep up the delusion.

He therefore shook hands with the other man with as much cordiality as if he had known him all his life, although he had no more idea than the man in the moon who he was.

"Where have you been keeping yourself all this time, Howard?" inquired the man calling himself Wentworth. "It must be five years since you went away, isn't it?"

"Yes, about that," replied Burr guardedly. "Well, I've been nearly everywhere, Europe, the West, South and Central America—"

"Europe?" interrupted the other. "Why, I thought you went direct to South America and settled down there. Didn't you tell me you saw Howard in Porto Rico four years ago when you were down there, Tom?" he continued, turning to his companion.

"Certainly," responded the other. "You must remember that, Mr. Preston?"

It was getting pretty hot for the detective, but he determined to face it out as best he could.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "I cannot forget that. But I left there shortly after you saw me and went to Europe."

"It must have been some time after," returned the other rather sullenly, "for you were there when I got back a year afterwards, you remember?"

"Yes, I know, but—er—I'm sorry, gentlemen," faltered the detective, hurriedly rising, "but this is my station. I must get off here. Good-day."

And he reached the gate just in time to get out before the train started.

He hadn't thought of getting off till he came to the next station, but he concluded from the way matters stood it would save a good deal of explanation, which he did not believe he would be able to make.

But he was sorely puzzled to know who the person could be who resembled him so closely that his best friends mistook the detective for him.

However, as he hurried on toward Broadway, the matter passed out of his mind in the confusion of other more important reflections.

The lawyer's office was on the top floor of one of the tall buildings on lower Broadway, and a few minutes later he entered the office and asked the clerk, whom he found writing in the outer office, if Mr. Banks was in.

The clerk looked up carelessly, but as soon as he caught sight of Burr's face his expression underwent a remarkable change. He first looked surprised, then smiled, and finally there was an expression of recognition.

"Why, how are you, Mr. Preston!" he exclaimed, rising and bowing deferentially. "When did you return?"

Again was the detective astonished.

Who could this Preston be that he had chanced to run against his acquaintances wherever he went?

And again he concluded to impersonate the person and see what would be the outcome.

"Just returned to-day," he replied to the clerk's inquiry, "and I am pretty well, thanks. Will you be good enough to see if Mr. Banks is in?"

"Certainly. But I cannot help remarking how well you are looking. You know you were not in very good health when you went away. The southern climate must agree with you?"

"So it does," rejoined Thad dryly.

He was wondering then whether Banks would make the same mistake, and if he did, how he (the detective) would manage it.

Meanwhile the clerk had disappeared into an inner office, from whence he soon reappeared and said:

"Mr. Banks would like to have you step inside, please."

As he spoke he opened the gate leading through the railing which cut off the space in front from the outer office, and Thad passed through.

"Right through that door," continued the clerk very politely, and the detective started toward the door.

Before he reached it, however, it opened and a woman dressed in black and closely veiled, came out, while a man whom he recognized from his resemblance to Edward Banks, stood directly behind her, bowing her out.

The woman took her leave in a soft, almost inaudible voice, and departed, and then the lawyer's eyes fell upon the detective.

An expression of astonishment came into his face; then he flushed and then turned pale; and finally put out his hand.

"Well, well, by all that is holy! Howard Preston, where did you drop from?" he exclaimed. "We thought you were dead and buried long ago."

Now Thad was mystified and puzzled.

The resemblance between him and this mysterious Preston must be something remarkable for even a lawyer to make the mistake.

For a second or two he was undecided what course to pursue—to still keep up the deception and run the risk of being caught, or to explain that he was not the person the lawyer had mistaken him for.

At length, however, he decided upon the former. It would be risky, but no more so than many other schemes he had entered into for the purpose of carrying out his plots, and there was a better chance of learning what he desired under false colors than if his real personality were known.

"Indeed?" he replied to the lawyer's last remark. "And yet you see that I am very much alive, and here to tell the story."

"So I see, and yet—but come in, and let us talk it over in confidence."

Burr entered the room and the lawyer closed the door.

"Now," he thought, "I am in for it. I shall have to play my cards very fine not to get caught."

And then he wondered what the relations of the two women were.

A moment later the two men were seated opposite each other, and the lawyer commenced:

"Now tell me, Howard, all about this business. The last letter I received from you was from Porto Rico, about two years ago. You then spoke of going further south, if you remember."

"So I did," replied Thad, groping his way and wondering how he was to come out of the tangle.

"And did you?"

"Yes."

"Where did you go?"

"Oh, I went to Peru and other South American points, as far south as the Cape."

"That is funny. I wrote you at Callao, but received no response, and then some time after I got a letter from some Spaniard stating that you had been killed by your mule slipping from the trail while crossing the Cordilleras. I wrote for particulars, but never received any reply, and now here you are! Tell me all about your adventures."

"That would take too long," said Thad, anxious to get away from the theme which was liable to swamp him at any moment. "I just came from St. Louis yesterday, and while there heard that your brother Edward was in trouble, or was likely to get into trouble in consequence of his connection with the policy shops of this city, and so hurried on to see if I could be of any service to him."

This statement, made at random, as it was, caused the lawyer to open his eyes very wide and to stare at the detective very hard.

"Well," he said finally in slow, measured tones, "I do not know that Edward is in any more danger of getting into trouble than usual. He is always liable to get into trouble, as you know, but he is able to take care of himself. He has always beaten the police so far, and I guess he will be able to continue to do so. But speaking of St. Louis, it's a wonder you didn't hear of him down there. He went there two weeks ago, and so far as I know is there yet."

"Indeed? I wish I had known that. I certainly would have looked him up. What has he gone there for? Anything wrong here?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders significantly.

"As I say, no more than usual," he answered. "They have been trying to make it a little hot for him; but as I also said, he will prove equal to them. By the way, have you been home yet?"

Thad hesitated, and said to himself, "Where the deuce is my home—that is, the home of this mysterious man whom I am impersonating?"

Then he answered aloud:

"No."

The lawyer gave a sigh of relief.

"I am glad of that," he murmured. "It will be better for us to go together, I think."

"Why?" questioned Burr. "Anything gone wrong?"

"Yes, everything, Howard, everything."

"Well—"

Here the detective cast his eyes about the room in search of the lawyer's Christian name, for in the burst of confidence in which he was about to indulge he felt the necessity of addressing his companion by his Christian name.

At length his eyes rested upon it—painted on the glass door of the private office—Thomas F. Banks.

"Well, Tom," he proceeded, "I am able to bear the news, whatever it may be, for I have learned by bitter experience in the past few years to stand anything. Tell me the whole story from the beginning to the end."

The detective believed he had made a happy stroke here.

If the lawyer could be induced to tell the story, whatever it might be, there was no telling but it might bring out the very facts which he was desirous of ascertaining.

"Well," began the lawyer slowly, after a brief silence, "the fact is—but say, suppose we go to the house. I have nothing particular to do this afternoon, and there we can be quiet and have no chance of interruption as we have here."

"Just as you say, Tom," responded Thad. "Just as you say, only tell me the whole story."

"Oh, you shall have the whole of it. We'll go up there and have a bottle of wine and some cigars, and then we can talk over old times in a proper spirit."

With that the lawyer rose and, putting on his hat, strode out of the office, followed by the half mystified detective.

Stopping long enough in the outer office to tell his clerk that he wouldn't be back that afternoon, the lawyer walked out to the elevator.

Both men remained silent as they descended in the elevator, and both were busy with their thoughts.

As for Thad, he felt that he was about to undergo a very severe ordeal.

He had not the least idea where he was going, but from the hint thrown out by the other, he guessed that it was to a house supposed to be his former home.

Who would he meet there? And would they recognize him? And if so, how was he to conduct himself so as not to get caught?

Would they not ply him with questions upon matters of which he knew nothing? And if they did, how was he to answer them?

As he considered all these things his brain fairly swam.

He would need all his ready wit to pass through this ordeal, and there were many chances of failure.

But he was in for it now, and there was no such thing as going back.

They walked a little way up Broadway, and then Banks called a cab.

"This seems like old times, Tom," ventured the detective. "I suppose you haven't forgotten the times you and I have bowled about town at all times of the night in a rig like this?"

The lawyer looked at him in surprise.

"Why, Howard, what are you talking about?" he cried, almost indignantly. "I never was out with you on your carousals, as you ought to remember. I guess you are thinking of Edward. I have heard him tell about your disgraceful sprees. But I cannot imagine how you got me mixed up in your mind with anything of the kind."

"You are right, since you mention it," answered Thad, quickly. "So it was Ned. How did I ever come to make such a mistake? But the fact is, Tom, that since I had the fever there in Lima my memory is wretched."

"Worse than ever, eh?"

"Yes, worse than ever, and you know it never was any too good."

"I cannot forget that, Howard," said the other, grimly. "For instance, there was the five hundred dollars you were to send back to me as soon as you got South, and which you appear to have forgotten entirely."

This was a poser.

How was he to explain this away?

It would be necessary, evidently, if he wanted to keep on good terms with his new acquaintance.

"Did you never receive that money, Tom?" he questioned, with apparently deep concern.

"You know very well I did not," retorted the lawyer, sharply.

There was but one thing now, and that was to assume a defensive attitude, so he answered:

"If it comes to that, Tom, I must tell you once for all that I did not know, until this moment, that you had not received the money, for I sent it to you, as sure as there is a God, as I can prove. But if you say that you did not receive it, I have nothing but to accept your word, and, that you shall lose nothing, I shall give you another like sum as soon as we get to the house."

Banks turned upon him quickly.

He evidently saw that he had been hasty, and was quick to retract his words.

"Forgive me, old fellow!" he cried extending his hand. "I spoke hastily, I see now, and am truly sorry for it. Since you put it like that I am convinced that you did send the money. But I am telling you nothing but the truth when I say that I did not receive it."

"I am convinced of that. And, as I say,

you shall have the money as soon as we get to the house."

"No, I will not accept it," rejoined the other stoutly. "If you sent it, as I am convinced you did, I do not wish you to lose the amount. I am better able to afford the loss than you are, and I will not permit you to pay it a second time."

"To tell you the truth, I am not any too flush, Tom; but, rather than have you think that I did not pay you that five hundred dollars, I will willingly part with the last red I have in the world."

"I know it, and for that reason you shall pay me nothing."

Then the two men lapsed into silence again, and Thad began to wonder whether the lawyer would tell the cabby where to drive or leave it to him. If the latter, he was in a fix, for he had no more idea where to go than the cabby himself. Then all of a sudden a suspicion flashed upon him: Did he really resemble the party in question, or was this a carefully concocted plot to entrap him?

CHAPTER VII.

A FAINT CLUE.

As the cab bowled along Thad grew more and more anxious, and, cool as he was under ordinary circumstances, he could not repress a feeling akin to nervousness in anticipation of what might be in store for him.

The recollection of the two men in the train who had pretended to recognize him came to him, and he began to connect in his mind the chain of a very pretty plot.

Suppose these men had followed him from home, or from the Police Headquarters, for that matter?

He knew how perfectly the policy king's gang was organized, that he had spies in every nook and corner of the city, and it was not unlikely that they knew, almost as soon as the police department, that he had been detailed on the case.

Was it not easy, therefore, for them to have followed him from the superintendent's office to his house, and then, when he started down town, to have boarded the same car? The next thing was to pretend to confound him with some mysterious person who probably had no real existence, in order to mystify him, and, according to programme, the clerk and lawyer pretended to mistake him for the same person.

The more he thought of this the more fully convinced he became that this theory was correct. For it was hardly probable that he resembled another man so closely that intimate friends could not distinguish them apart.

He had been silent for some moments, and his agitation had caused him to perspire freely.

The lawyer, who was also silent, finally noticed the detective's agitation, and asked in surprise:

"Why, what is the matter, Howard? Aren't you feeling well?"

"The fact is, I am not feeling as well as I could wish," he replied. "Besides, the suspense you have put me in by hinting at trouble at the house, without telling me anything about it. Suppose you tell me something about it now, and relieve my suspense."

"Then you really know nothing of what has happened within the last year?" said the lawyer.

"Nothing whatever. How could I? I have had no word from home for more than two years."

"I wrote you less than two years ago, and you must have received my letters."

"I answered every one that I received, so you can tell by that how much I know of what has been going on here. So don't keep me in suspense, when you can as well tell me something of the story here."

The lawyer was silent for a few moments, and then began:

"You remember the evening when you left so suddenly?"

"Perfectly," replied Thad, and wondered what had really happened on that occasion.

"Well—but the least said about that the better. The fact of your coming to my office and not referring to the matter shows me that you do not wish it referred to. I wrote you about your father's death,

which was followed by that of your mother, both caused by the knowledge of your disgrace."

Thad covered his face with his handkerchief and sobbed aloud.

"Go on," he demanded, sternly.

"I do not know that I should," responded the lawyer with a sigh. "I do not see that it is going to do any good to harrow up your feelings with a recital of all that your poor parents suffered through you. If you will promise me that you are determined to turn over a new leaf, I shall be happy to say 'let by gones be by gones,' so far as our differences are concerned."

"Tom," exclaimed Thad, looking up with an expression of intense suffering depicted in his face, "let us forget everything that has occurred between us of an unpleasant nature. I confess that I was doubtful how you would receive me to-day, and when I found the same old cordiality that characterized you in the past, I was too deeply touched to say a word."

Banks extended his hand and Thad grasped it warmly, congratulating himself on having performed a very pretty piece of acting, and that, too, without making any serious break.

Having been so successful thus far he concluded to venture a little further.

"Did—did my mother leave any message for me, Tom?" he asked in a faltering voice.

"Yes, she left a message with me, but I did not write it to you at the time, and it slipped out of my memory."

"What was it, Tom?"

"It was this: 'Tell Howard to be a good man, and that I love him just the same as if he had committed no crime, and that she hoped you would soon come back and watch over and take good care of Lottie.' That was all."

Thad again covered his face and groaned.

"It was so good of her," he moaned, "to forgive me and I shall try very hard for her sake to comply with her request in every particular. Especially shall I take care of poor little Lottie!"

To his utter astonishment, the answer came in a tone approaching levity.

"You will?" queried the lawyer.

"I shall try to," was the response.

"Then you do know where she is?"

Burr looked at him curiously.

"I always believed it," pursued Banks, "although the others ridiculed the idea. I never had any other opinion."

"Pardon me, Tom," the detective finally made out to stammer, "but I'm blessed if I know what you are driving at."

"Oh, no, of course not!" cried the other in a sneering tone. "You don't know where Lottie is, or was?"

"Of course not!" retorted Thad sternly. "How should I know? As I told you, I have heard nothing from home except when you wrote me, and you said nothing about Lottie."

"The deuce I didn't! It's funny that you should have answered my letter, saying that you knew where she was!"

This was a bad break.

For a moment he was dazed.

How was he to get out of the hole into which he had inadvertently tumbled?

In his desperation he finally assumed what he deemed the safest course, the defensive.

"I remember now that you recall it, that I did say I knew where she was, but you must have been very blind if you did not read between the lines of that letter, Tom."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I intended you to understand from what I said that those here who were responsible for her welfare ought to know where she was. That was all. Now tell me, where is she?"

"You know as well as I do," rejoined the lawyer coolly.

"Then you know nothing?"

"I do not."

"When did she disappear?"

"Just about a year ago."

"And you do not know where she went?"

"I swear it!"

"Did she go of her own free will?"

"It would seem so, as she took her baggage."

"And alone?"

"I do not know."

"What do you think?"

"My opinion is that she went alone."

"Have you any idea why she went away?"

"None whatever. Perhaps she feared that you might come back, and she did not want to see you."

Here was fresh mystery.

Why did this woman, whoever she was, fear that this man, whoever he might be, should come back?

The detective saw that there was some terrible mystery here, the nature of which he could not even guess.

He had pursued the inquiry thus far in the hope that it might in some inexplicable way lead to the information he was seeking, but having gone thus far and having seen no trace of the secret he was desirous of probing, he determined to drop it, if the other would permit him to do so.

He had even contemplated making some excuse for leaving the cab rather than proceed to the house, lest he should be involved in some unpleasant and useless complications, but he had hardly arrived at the decision when the cab stopped before a handsome brown stone house in upper Fifth avenue, and the lawyer jumped out and ascended the steps, beckoning the detective to follow him.

The latter was a little disappointed, as he had hoped they were going to the residence of Edward Banks instead.

By the time the lawyer had put the key in the door and opened it Burr was at his heels, and the two men entered the house.

"What now?" Thad asked himself.

But he had time for very little thought, for the lawyer, who still kept the lead, had proceeded up a broad flight of stairs.

The detective wondered a little at his lack of politeness in not allowing him to go first, but before he had reached the top of the stairs another thought entered his head.

Whose house was this?

The lawyer had spoken before leaving the office as if it were the home of the mysterious Howard Preston, but if that was the case, the lawyer did not act as if it were at present.

However, when he reached the top he awaited the arrival of the detective, and then taking a few steps at his side, opened a door and bade him enter.

Thad hesitated and stole a glance at the face of his companion.

The latter smiled encouragingly and said: "Walk in, Howard. Why do you hesitate?"

Thad was too brave a man to fear anything, although he experienced a slight qualm on entering this place, and as the door stood wide open, cast his eyes inside and about the room before proceeding.

He saw only a well furnished room, with no sign of any living creature about, and, as he knew himself to be equal to this one man, he decided to enter, and walked in.

The lawyer closed the door with suspicious suddenness, he thought, but as, a moment later, he took the detective by the arm in a cordial manner and conducted him to a seat on a lounge, the latter regained his confidence, and sat down.

Thad made no reference to the subject they had been discussing, and opened the conversation by saying:

"You say Ned is in St. Louis?"

"Yes."

"When did he go?"

"About two weeks ago."

"Let me see," mused the detective. "That was about the time that a detective went to his house with a warrant for his arrest, wasn't it?"

Banks looked at him in astonishment.

"How did you know about that?" he demanded sternly.

"As I told you, I heard something about his trouble while in St. Louis."

"I don't know how they should have heard of that down there," growled Banks.

"Perhaps Ned told some of his friends, and you know how things of that kind will get about."

"Yes," growled the other dryly, fixing his eyes suspiciously on the detective's face.

"Or, perhaps, some of the detectives went down there after him, and they gave it away."

"Very likely."

This was uttered in a more dogged spirit than the other sentence, and Thad began to believe that the fellow knew or suspected who he was.

"I also heard," pursued the detective, "that the detective who went to make the arrest suddenly disappeared, and has not been seen or heard of since."

"Um!" grunted the lawyer, his brow ominously dark. "You appear to have heard a good deal about Ned's affairs, didn't you?"

"Yes, considerable," rejoined the detective, cheerfully, affecting not to notice the lawyer's consternation.

"How did you happen to hear all this?" inquired Banks, after a silence of some moments' duration, during which he continued to keep his eyes fixed on Thad's face.

"Oh, I should have told you that," returned the detective, as if he had been moved by an inspiration. "I forgot to tell you."

I met a young man down there who was from New York, and we got into conversation, and I found that he was a nephew of Ned's—Herbert something—and he told me that he had a falling out with his uncle, and had been working with this young detective in trying to trace Ned to his place of concealment in order to arrest him."

The lawyer looked at him harder than ever, and finally said:

"You say Herbert Crosby told you this?"

"Yes, yes, that was his name. It's funny I should have forgotten it."

"It is a little strange that you should have forgotten your own cousin's name," growled the lawyer. "When was this?"

"When he told me?"

"Yes."

Thad realized he was on dangerous ground, and proceeded cautiously accordingly.

"Let me see," he mused. "I think it was last Monday, if I am not mistaken."

Banks laughed.

"Last Monday?" he smiled.

"I wouldn't be certain, but I think it was Monday."

"Might it not have been Tuesday?"

"It might."

"Or Wednesday?"

"I hardly think it was as late as that, but—"

"I guess not," laughed Banks. "In fact, I guess you did not see him at all, for he has been here every day for two weeks. You see I just thought I'd see how far you would go without making a serious break. You have acted your part with remarkable skill from the first, and I cannot help complimenting you on it, but I knew from the first that you would strike a snag sooner or later. Now perhaps you imagine I don't know who you are, Mr. Thaddeus Burr, and that I wasn't onto your little game from the start. Perhaps you think that I did not know you were coming to my office as soon as you did?"

Thad was thunderstruck, and jumped to his feet.

"You may as well keep quiet," pursued the lawyer. "You are perfectly safe here. There is no danger of your escaping. Now perhaps you would like to know how I discovered that you were coming to my office?"

Before Thad had time to answer a curtain parted and the identical men Burr had seen in the Elevated train stepped out!

CHAPTER VIII.

SERIOUS COMPLICATIONS.

THAD saw now that the whole thing had been a well-conceived plot to get him into this house, for what purpose God alone could tell.

Perhaps to murder him!

He began to see now the wonderful power exercised by this Edward Banks, and no longer wondered that the police had never made any progress in the direction of capturing him or breaking up his nefarious business.

He could easily imagine what had been the fate of poor Ned Preston, and expected nothing else than that he would follow in his footsteps.

One thought comforted him, however, and that was the reputation of Banks for gentleness and aversion for cruelty.

Perhaps after all they would only keep

him in confinement, in which case there would always be a chance of escape.

Meanwhile the three men stood looking at him with a broad grin of satisfaction.

That they were highly gratified at having captured this famous detective was plain.

There was only one thing now that he wondered at, and that was why they had pretended that he resembled some mysterious person, when any other ruse would have served as well.

That such a person as Howard Preston ever existed he no longer believed in the least.

"What have you to say now, Mr. Burr?" sneeringly asked Banks. "Do you not think that you have been a pretty easy fly to entice into our web?"

Thad saw that there was nothing to do but make the best of his situation, and concluded to make light of it.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "I walked into your trap with my eyes open, though, as I have often done in the pursuit of my duty. But I never fail to get out again, don't forget that!"

The three men indulged in a hearty laugh at this boast.

"You have undoubtedly been very successful in the past, but you may find it different this time," sneered Banks. "The young man who was so bold as to attempt to serve the warrant on me—"

"What?"

"On my brother, I mean," pursued the other, growing a little red and agitated over his mistake, "found it no easy task to escape once his soaring wings were entangled in the web, and it will be the same with you."

The detective was still armed, and they had made no effort to disarm him, but he realized the futility of attempting to use his weapons there, so he resumed his seat and concluded to bide his time and wait for an opportunity to escape.

"You may as well know at once what to expect," pursued the lawyer. "So long as you remain passive no harm shall come to you, but the moment violence or to escape—well, it won't be so well for you."

And then turning to the two other men who had come in, he continued:

"Come, gentlemen, I think dinner is ready. Let us go down."

"I'm with you," replied one of the men.

"And I," said the other.

And with that they all three filed out of the room, without so much as taking leave of the detective, and, to all appearances, leaving the door unlocked.

Thad sat there in a bewildered state of mind for some minutes after the departure of the three, and then he began to examine his surroundings.

He saw that he was in an elegantly furnished apartment, from which another room was curtained off by heavy rich *portieres*.

The walls were hung with costly paintings and rare curios, and everywhere the eye chafed to wander it met with evidences of wealth and taste.

After sitting for some time thus, he arose and walked to the door.

He tried the knob and, to his surprise, found the door unlocked.

Nevertheless, he made no attempt to escape, as he had no doubt the hallway was well guarded.

He then returned into the room and began the examination of its wealth and curiosities.

After making the tour of the room into which he had been brought he pulled aside the curtains and ventured into the adjoining room.

This was also richly furnished, and in addition to the other furniture, was a sumptuous looking bed.

"I wonder if this is to be my place of abode?" mused the detective. "If it is, they evidently intend to treat me pretty well."

As he strolled about this room, examining its many rich bits of bric-a-brac, his eye fell upon a large frame standing upon a bronze easel, and containing a number of photographs.

Almost the first picture that attracted his attention was one of a man about his own age or perhaps a little younger which, he could not help but see, bore a striking resemblance to himself.

But this did not astonish him so much as

the inscription under the picture, evidently written by the subject himself. It read:

"Sincerely yours,

HOWARD PRESTON."

"Then Howard Preston, the man for whom these fellows affected to mistake me, is not a myth after all," he mused. "Still I cannot understand why they should have used that as a ruse to get me into this trap."

But while he was puzzling over this mystery his eye was wandering from one face to another of the other portraits in the frame.

Suddenly it fell upon another picture that startled him more than the other one had. Or rather, it was the inscription under it, for the picture was that of a very beautiful woman whom he had never seen. But the inscription read:

"Faithfully until death,

LOTTIE PRESTON."

This proved to the detective that the two persons of whom the lawyer had spoken were real after all, and his curiosity was aroused to know what the mystery about them was.

Now that he had discovered that the girl was a real personage, it was possible there might be some truth in the story of her mysterious disappearance.

But why had this man told the detective about it?

The affair was doubtless a family secret, and why should he have related it to him, who was a total stranger?

That there was some dreadful mystery behind it all he had not the least doubt, and he determined to improve the time of his imprisonment in discovering whatever there was to be discovered.

In one angle of the room stood a cabinet of dark wood richly inlaid. It contained many drawers, and he had no doubt they contained documents which would throw some light upon the mystery.

It was growing quite gloomy in this second room from the approach of nightfall, and he decided to light the gas in a chandelier overhead, and stepped out into the outer room to look for a match.

But he had no more than done so, when the door opened and a servant entered with a large tray covered with dishes.

Without a word the servant walked to a table at one end of the room and put the tray down upon a table there.

Thad then saw that the dishes contained all sorts of the richest food, in addition to which were a couple of decanters containing wine.

After depositing the tray upon the table the servant bowed himself out without uttering a word and closed the door behind him.

"Well," thought the detective, "this is not bad, and just the thing I was beginning to feel the need of."

With that he seated himself at the table without more ceremony, and poured out a glass of wine.

Holding the sparkling goblet up to the light to examine its contents, he muttered to himself:

"Here's to you, my mysterious hosts!"

And drank the wine.

He had no more than swallowed it, however, although it was about as delicious as he had ever tasted, before he was oppressed with a sense of misgiving.

"What a fool I was to have drank it!" he muttered to himself. "Who knows but it is poisoned, or contains some drowsy potion that will soon sap me of my vitality?"

However, after he had sat meditating thus for some minutes and there was no worse result from the wine than a slight exhilaration, such as he might expect from any wine, he concluded that he had been mistaken, and as his appetite, which was sharp before, had been considerably whetted by the draught, he fell to and began to devour the viands with great relish.

There was some sort of delicious soup to begin with, and this was followed by some excellent fish. Besides these were several kinds of meat, including fowls and game, a number of vegetables and fancy dishes, and all piping hot.

"Well," he mused, as he disposed of one toothsome dish after another, "they evidently do not intend that I shall starve while I remain a prisoner."

Thad had got through with the various courses and had pushed back from the table, when the servant again appeared bringing a steaming hot pudding and pot of delicious coffee.

Removing the fragments of the rest of the meal and placing these on the table, the servant withdrew as silently as he had done before.

And there had been such an air of mystery about the fellow that Thad had somehow refrained from speaking to him, but he determined to do so the next time he came in, and, if possible, find out something about the intentions of his jailers and the extent of the guard which he would probably have to pass in attempting to make his escape.

Burr had disposed of his pudding and a cup of the coffee and settled back in his chair, when the servant again entered without knocking and as silently as before, and placed a box of fine cigars on the table before him.

He then proceeded to remove the last remnants of the sumptuous meal, when Thad addressed him.

"What has become of your master, Mr. Banks?" he asked.

The servant stared at him, but not only did not reply, but there was not so much as an indication of intelligence on his face.

He stared like a manikin or wax figure, as though he had not understood what had been said to him, although it was evident he had heard it.

"Don't you hear me?" demanded the detective rather sharply. "I asked you where your master was. Do you understand that?"

Still the servant continued to stare like an idiot, but made no response.

Thad lost his patience, and jumping to his feet, grasped the fellow's arm and shook him till the dishes in his arms rattled.

"See here!" he thundered, "are you deaf and dumb, or just playing a part? I want you to tell me where your master, the lawyer, Thomas Banks is."

The poor fellow looked a little alarmed, but did not utter a word, and as soon as Thad had released his arm, slipped out of the room as hastily and noiselessly as possible.

"Well, that beats everything I ever saw or heard of!" muttered the astonished detective, staring at the door which had closed behind the vanished waiter. "I wonder if the fellow is really a deaf mute, or has been taught to hold his tongue? What an excellent barber he would make!"

He then picked up one of the cigars and lit it, and seating himself in an easy chair, proceeded to take things easy, meanwhile ruminating upon his predicament.

Suddenly his mind again reverted to the pictures, the mystery of the missing girl and the cabinet, and jumped up.

Finding some matches, he returned to the rear apartment, lighted the gas and proceeded to the cabinet.

To his great surprise, the drawers were not locked, and he began to draw out first one and then another and examine their contents.

They consisted principally of letters addressed to various members of the family, and were of no particular interest, but finally he came upon one addressed to "Mrs. Thomas F. Banks," and the detective was interested in it because it was in the same handwriting as the inscription under the picture of Lottie Preston.

He removed the letter from the envelope and found that it was written to the girl's sister (Mrs. Banks, the lawyer's wife, most likely,) and from its contents the detective inferred that she possessed a good deal of property which was in the hands of Edward Banks, and that she was fearful that he was trying to beat her out of it.

The letter was dated at St. Louis, and the writer spoke of being on the point of returning to New York shortly.

From the date of the letter it had been written about a year before, and the detective concluded that it must be about the time that she disappeared.

This, he concluded, might prove to be a clue to something, though at that moment he did not know what, and he put it into his pocket, and proceeded to look further.

Nothing more was found which appeared worth preserving except a small memoran-

dum-book which had belonged to this same girl, and he put that into his pocket for future reference.

Burr then closed the drawers, turned out the gas and returned to the front room.

It was then that an idea occurred to him.

The room was in total darkness, as he had turned out the light on going into the back room, and before lighting it up again he walked to the door and opened it. Putting his head out, he listened.

The halls were brilliant with light, and the sound of conversation, mingled with an occasional peal of laughter came from somewhere below.

He stepped out into the hall and looked about him.

No one was in sight, and he walked to the top of the stairs and looked over the balustrade. He could see all the way to the bottom of the stairs, and no one was in sight.

There appeared to be nothing in the way of his escape, and the detective returned to the room for his hat and then came out again, determined to make an effort to regain his liberty.

He stole softly along the carpeted hallway to the top of the stairs again, and there appearing nothing in the way of his descent, started down.

He now located the sounds of the merriment, which appeared to come from the front parlor on the first floor.

He would have to pass this on his way out, and as he descended a little further, he could see that the door of the parlor was open.

Could he pass this without attracting the attention of the inmates?

The detective was determined to try, and walked softly on down the stairs. When near the foot it occurred to him to remove his hat, as he was less likely to attract attention bareheaded than with his hat on.

Thus he walked boldly toward the front door, but before he reached it two burly footmen stepped out from behind a *portiere* on one side of the hall and confronted him.

Thad was determined not to be stopped by these menials, however, and drew his revolver. Leveling it at them, he commanded,

"Stand aside and let me pass!"

CHAPTER IX.

AN INGENIOUS TORTURE.

If the servant up-stairs had appeared indifferent to the detective's appeal, these two burly and silent footmen were doubly so as regarded his revolver.

If he had pointed a stick of candy at them they could not have shown greater indifference.

So far from "standing aside," as he had ordered them, they did not so much as wink or pretend to notice that he was in the vicinity.

Burr was exasperated, and making a move toward them with his cocked revolver, he repeated his demand:

"Stand aside, I say! or I'll blow your stupid heads off!"

And without more ado, he cuffed one of them on the side of the head so severely that he slunk to one side, but the other one quickly took his place.

Thad was about to serve him in a similar manner, but at that moment the first one, who had slyly slipped round to his back, pinioned the detective's arms from behind, and so great was the fellow's strength that Thad was unable to move.

With his own giant-like strength and great activity he would soon have been able to wrench himself loose from his captor, but before he had time to do it the other one took a hand, and the detective was thrown upon his back as if he had been a child.

With two such giants to contend with he was unable to do anything, and before he was aware of it, he was lifted from the floor and carried back up-stairs.

Here he was thrust back into his room and the door closed.

But to his great astonishment they had neither disarmed him nor did they lock the door after thrusting him into the room.

During all this exciting episode not a word had escaped his antagonists, nor was there any change of countenance on their part. They went about their work of putting him on his back and carrying him up-

stairs as they might have done a piece of baggage, without moving a muscle of their stolid faces.

But the strangest thing about it was that, although they had created quite a little noise in the hall by the scuffle, it appeared not to have attracted the attention of the people in the parlor, for the sound of the merriment never ceased for an instant.

Left to himself again the detective threw himself into an easy-chair and gave himself up to thought.

What could be the meaning of all this? he wondered.

Was there no chance of escape?

Certainly not for the present, and he decided to take matters easy.

He lighted the gas and, by way of killing time, took out the little memorandum-book and began to con its pages.

It proved to be the diary of the young girl whose name was written under the photograph, and simply recorded the simple and uninteresting events of a school girl, and yet he took a great interest in it for some unaccountable reason.

As he got along toward the end of the book he began to notice frequent references to Howard Preston, but for a long time he could not make out whether he was her brother or sweetheart.

Burr naturally assumed that they were brother and sister from having the same name, but he finally ran across a note which explained the nature of their relationship.

It appeared that he was the adopted son of her father, but it was only a short time before the recording of the note that she had discovered that they were not brother and sister.

It appeared evident from the notes following that they were deeply in love with each other, but there were frequent complaints on her part of his cruelty and neglect, and once she said that she could no longer bear such treatment from one who possessed her whole heart, and she contemplated self-destruction.

Soon after this, however, the notes took on a more cheerful aspect, and it was evident they had made up.

But toward the last all mention of his name ceased, and the tone of her notes was gloomy in the extreme.

So they went on to the end, or nearly the end. The very last memorandum contained something that caused him to think. It read as follows:

"It being all over with him, I hope I shall never see him again. The proposition of E. B. is cruel—wicked, but there is nothing else for me. I suppose he will soon tire of me, and my course will be the same as the rest. But life is but one big, long heart-ache anyway, so here goes."

The detective puzzled over this memorandum a good deal.

What could it mean? And who was "E. B.?" "E. B." mused the detective, "must mean Edward Banks. Who else could it mean? Then this arch villain was doubtless responsible for the disappearance of the girl."

Was it possible that the lawyer had no knowledge of what had become of her?

Had no detective been put on her track? And if so, had he not sense enough to guess what that memorandum meant?

It had grown late when he finished the memorandum, and he had become drowsy.

He looked at his watch, and found that it was after one o'clock, and he went to the door and opened it once more.

The noise down-stairs was greater than ever.

It seemed as if there must be at least twenty persons in the parlor, and from the noise they were making, it would appear that they were pretty merry with wine.

Would it not be a good time, he mused, to make another attempt at escape?

But when he thought the matter over coolly, he came to the conclusion that he would have the same fight for nothing, unless he deliberately shot one of the burly guards down like a dog, and he did not want to do that.

Perhaps later in the night—the hour just preceding daylight was the drowsiest hour of the night, and that would be an excellent time for a break for liberty. He would wait till then.

With that resolution he returned into the room, and by way of killing time—he had no notion of sleeping—picked up a novel and began to read.

Hour after hour went by, and still he read on. The sound of revelry still continued, and he knew that it was not yet time to make his break.

Time after time he arose, and went to the door to listen, but the hubbub was still in progress, and he would return to his seat and bury his face and thoughts in the novel.

But at length the interest of the book flagged, and his weariness became so great that he could no longer resist it, and he dropped off into a doze.

How long he slept he knew not, but when he finally awoke it was with a feeling of oppression and nausea, and when he opened his eyes he found himself in total darkness.

What could be the meaning of it?

The gas was burning when he went to sleep. It must have been turned off down-stairs. Or, for that matter, some one might have come into the room and turned it off.

Was it possible that he had slept so soundly as not to have awoke with a person entering the room? This was something quite unusual with him, for he was a very light sleeper.

Thad arose with the intention of going to the door, for the air was heavy and stifling where he was, but it was so dark that he knew not which way to proceed. However, he strode off, thinking that he would ultimately find the door, if not at once.

But he hadn't taken three steps when he came plump against what appeared to be a solid wall.

This was strange, as he was sitting a long way from the wall when he went to sleep.

He felt along the wall, and was surprised to find that it was of rough stone, and then he realized for the first time that the place was exceedingly damp.

Moving backward to the place from which he had started he reached the chair in which he had been sitting, and after feeling over it, he discovered that it was the same one he had been sitting in when he fell asleep.

This puzzled him more than ever. They must have moved him, chair and all, to this spot, wherever it was.

Finally he thought it would be more to the purpose if he could make a light, and, feeling in his pockets, he was lucky enough to find some matches.

Striking one of the matches and holding it up, he soon discovered where he was, or rather the sort of place he was in, for he could not tell where it was located.

From what he could see the place was about six feet in diameter, circular in shape like a cistern, and walled with rough stones.

It was impossible to tell how far it was to the top, but it must have been a long distance, for it extended as far as he could see by light of the match.

This was a severe and gloomy contrast to the elegantly furnished room he had been put into in the first place, and the worst of it was, that there appeared no hope of ever getting out.

There might possibly be a chance of climbing up the rough walls if he could contrive to dig out some of the mortar, but that would be an endless task.

However, it would not do to despair, so drawing out a large knife which he always carried and lighting a match, he approached the wall with the view to discovering the hardness of the mortar, when he made a discovery that caused him to pause.

Around the wall at regular intervals were hung a number of dynamite shells with sensitive fuses attached, so that the slightest touch would cause the shells to explode.

This precluded the possibility of his climbing up, as he could not get over these shells without danger of exploding it, and even the concussion which would be caused by merely picking the plaster out would in all probability set them off.

This appeared to put an end to his chance for escape, and for the first time in his life the detective was almost in despair.

In his desperation he lighted another match and examined the floor of his prison, but only to find that it was of solid stone like the walls.

Therefore there was no hope of escape in that direction.

His brain grew dizzy and he resumed his seat in the chair to ponder over his situation. He went over the situation thoroughly, and tried to invent some plan by which he might surmount his difficulties.

But there appeared to be no hope.

All there was for it, so far as he could see, was to quietly await the death that was sure to come sooner or later from starvation, for he did not imagine they would bother themselves about feeding him in that gloomy place.

But as he sat there thinking, there came a happy thought to him.

The shells were all suspended several feet from the ground, and he knew that dynamite exerted its greatest force upward. Could he not contrive to explode one of the shells while lying flat on the ground, and thus escape its force?

But when he thought the matter over carefully he decided that it was impractical, as the explosion would most likely shake down the whole wall and cover him under the debris.

Still, there was another hope.

The shells might be removed from the wall, at least a part of them, which would afford him an opportunity of climbing up, as he had contemplated in the first place.

He lighted another match and examined the shells, and found that they were suspended on strings fastened to pegs driven in the crevices between the stones.

It was a ticklish job, but by careful handling he was able to avoid touching the fuse, and succeeded in removing one or two of the deadly shells and laying them on the ground.

This left a passage-way on that side, and he proceeded very cautiously to dig out the mortar between the stones so as to allow him finger and foot hold in climbing.

It was a tedious job.

The mortar was exceedingly hard, and his matches would last so short a time that he was compelled to keep lighting fresh ones.

And then, when he had delved out the plaster for some feet above his head, his matches gave out entirely, and he was left to work in the dark.

This not only added to the difficulty, but put him in constant peril of his life, for there was no telling how soon some of the bits of falling mortar would ignite one or two of the shells which he had placed on the ground!

He was again almost in despair, when another new idea occurred to him.

He remembered that he had still another knife about him.

Like the one with which he had been delving out the mortar, it was a powerful knife, and he believed, strong enough to bear his weight.

If it should so prove, there was still hope for his escape.

Securing the knife, he reached over his head as far as he could and forced the blade into the crevice firmly.

He then took the other knife and drove it in about on a level with his waist.

Having done this, he grasped the upper knife firmly in his hand and drew himself up so that one foot rested upon the lower knife.

Now clinging to the rough stones with his left hand, he pulled the upper knife out and drove it in as high as he could reach again.

And now came the difficult feat of clinging to the upper knife while with his feet he drew out the lower one. This was finally accomplished, however, and the lower knife was driven in higher up than before, when he pulled himself up so that he could again stand upon it.

Thus the process was repeated over and over again until he thought he must be nearly to the top of the wall.

He was terribly fatigued, and the constant strain of clinging to the knives was rapidly telling on his strength.

Minute after minute and hour after hour dragged by, and still he found no indications of being near the top of the wall.

With superhuman strength and endurance he struggled on, and another hour went by.

Finally when he put his hand to place the upper knife it came in contact with the upper edge of the wall.

It may be imagined that the detective grasped the ledge with eagerness and proceeded to draw himself up.

But his danger was far from over yet.

There was imminent danger of the top line of stones slipping away under his weight and hurling him to the bottom of the well again.

In such an event he knew that instant death would result, for if the fall did not kill him, he would be sure to explode one of the shells, and that would certainly finish him.

CHAPTER X.

OUT OF THE FRYINGPAN INTO THE FIRE.

It was a severe ordeal, especially the last part of the climb, but by dint of hard work and extreme caution, the detective finally succeeded in making the top of the wall and climbed out.

But when he had succeeded in doing this much he knew no more where he was than when he was at the bottom of the shaft.

And what made it worse he had no more matches to strike a light.

It was still extremely dark, but whether it was due to its being night or that the place was some sort of dungeon he was unable to determine.

After a moment's rest from his terrible exertion, in which he thought rapidly what was the best move to make next, he proceeded straight ahead of him, moving with great caution and feeling before him with his outstretched hand that he might not be surprised by some dead wall, and making sure of his footing before each step by extending his foot.

Thus he proceeded for some time, and he concluded that he must have traveled a long distance, when he finally came to a wall.

Like the one around the cistern he had just escaped from, it was built of rough stones, which led him to believe that he was still in a basement or cellar.

Feeling carefully along the walls he finally came to a door, and it appeared to be only a frail construction, so after feeling about and failing to find any lock or latch, he at length forced the blade of one of his great knives behind the edge of it and gave it a vigorous wrench, when to his delight, the door burst open, showing that it had only been fastened by a frail bolt.

When he stepped outside of the door he found a short flight of steps leading upward, and also saw from the stars overhead that he was out of doors.

With a thrill of joy he bounded up the steps, and was soon in the open air.

Judging from the position of the stars he guessed that it was not far from morning, and he was eager to complete his escape before daylight.

It was still very dark, but he could make out that he was in a yard or court of some kind, and his only hope was that there was no impassable wall for him to cross.

But a few steps further showed him that his fears in this direction were too well founded, for a wall twenty feet high loomed before him.

Still he did not despair, for he concluded that there might be a gate, and hoped that it might be as frail as the door through which he had just passed.

Moving along the wall for some distance, he discovered the gate, but it was of iron and locked with an immense padlock.

Burr tried to climb this, but it was impossible, and he soon abandoned the effort.

What was to be done next?

He was little better off than when he was in the cistern, except that the air was purer.

Again he moved along the wall in the hope of finding another gate which could be either opened or climbed, but his search was in vain.

He at length came to the wall of the building from the basement of which he had just escaped, and he strode along close to this with the forlorn hope that there might be an outlet of some kind.

There was none, but at one angle a trailing vine ran up the wall and as the wall around the yard joined the building here, he concluded to attempt to climb to the top of the wall by means of the vine.

Grasping a firm hold of the vine, he threw his weight upon it, and was delighted to find that it would bear him, so he began to climb.

It did not take him long to reach the top of the fence and, although it was surmounted by a row of sharp spikes, he was able to get a footing on the top, and the only thing left him was to jump down on the other side.

This was a hazardous project, as there was no telling what might be below in the darkness, but he was too near desperate now to falter at anything.

Letting himself down on the opposite side of the wall till he merely clung on with his fingers, he let go his hold and dropped, fortunately on solid ground, and not far enough to result in any injury.

But the next instant he discovered that he was worse off than when he was on the other side of the wall, for he had no more than touched the ground when a couple of murderous bulldogs came tearing at him as if they intended to eat him alive.

Thad managed to dodge them, however, and draw his revolver. He realized the danger he was entailing upon himself by firing a pistol there, but it was the only alternative. It was either that or be eaten up by the dogs, and he chose the former.

The dogs still continued to prance about him barking loudly and watching their chance to nab him, and at last, finding that there was no other way out of the dilemma, he fired two shots in quick succession, and, although he could only see the outlines of the dogs, so well did he aim that both brutes were laid low.

But this did not end his trouble by any means. Indeed it only enhanced it, for the next instant three men who had been roused by the barking dogs and the pistol shots, rushed out, each with a revolver in his hand.

Thad saw that he was in for it, and hugged the wall as closely as possible in order to conceal himself in the shadow, and remained perfectly quiet.

The men rushed into the yard and looked about in search of the intruder, but could not see the detective.

"Who is it?" one finally asked.

Thad made no reply, but stood with his cocked revolvers ready to defend himself, if they attempted to attack him.

"Where is he?" demanded the speaker.

"He's hiding," suggested another, "and we're in poor business out here. He's got the drop on us, and if we ain't mighty careful he'll let us have it. Better go call a policeman."

This warning had the effect of causing all three of them to withdraw into the house, but Thad realized that his danger was not at an end, for if they chose to call a policeman, the latter would most likely begin to shoot at random as soon as he came into the yard without considering the consequences, so he determined to get out of there, if possible before the arrival of the officer.

But how was this to be done?

He approached the door where the men had gone in, and found they had not locked it.

Opening the door and stepping through, he found himself in the back room of a saloon.

He knew then that he was all right, so he quietly walked on into the bar-room, which was crowded with excited men awaiting the arrival of the policeman.

Everybody was too much excited to notice the detective, and he had no difficulty in mingling with the crowd and making his way out of the place, which he did just as the barkeeper returned with two policemen.

Thad made a note of the location of the building, and was astonished to find that it was in Thirty-ninth street, near First avenue, a very tough neighborhood, and fully a mile from the house where he had fallen asleep the night before.

From this, as well as from his own feelings, he knew that he must have been chloroformed after dropping asleep in his chair, otherwise they could never have removed him to the cistern without his knowledge.

He was startled and horrified at the discovery, not so much on account of his own narrow escape, but he thought of the probable fate of poor Ned Preston.

If he had been thrown in that place—and there was no reason to doubt that he was—the chances were that he was beyond rescue long before this.

It was quite evident that the lawyer never intended that he (the detective) should escape from that horrible place, otherwise he would never have dared to have him thrown down there, as he must have known that Thad would have no trouble in tracing him up afterward.

Burr went home, and, after taking a few hours' rest and some refreshments, disguised himself as a respectable old gentleman and paid another visit to the lawyer.

But he had his trip for nothing, for the lawyer was not in his office, having, as he was informed, gone to the country.

Thad did not believe this, however, but guessed that the cause of his absence from business was due to his late carousal the night before, so he called at the lawyer's house.

Here he was told that the lawyer had gone to the country, so it looked as if the story might be true.

He was at a temporary loss as to what move to make next, but finally concluded to visit the house of Edward Banks, although he had little hope of finding him in.

Arriving at the house and ringing the bell, he then began to cudgel his brain for an excuse for calling, and by the time the servant opened the door he had found one which he thought would answer.

"Tell Mr. Banks that Dr. Pellet would like to see him, that I was sent here by his brother Thomas," he told the servant, and the menial withdrew without saying anything about the policy king being out, and returned a few minutes later with the information that Mr. Banks would see him in a few minutes, and the invitation to step into the sitting room.

Thad thought he had gained a great point in being admitted to this man's presence, although he had heard of his wonderful power over men in general.

When he entered the sitting room he was met by Banks's daughter, Stella, who had entertained Ned on his entrance into the same place two weeks or so before.

She greeted him cordially and informed him that her father would see him in a few minutes, and then proceeded to converse pleasantly on various topics.

Thad was struck with the beauty and intelligence of the girl, and wondered that such a man should have such a daughter.

He had not long to wait before Banks came in and greeted him in the most cordial manner.

Scarcely had he shaken hands with the detective when the latter began to feel himself won over toward the man and began to argue with himself that this could not be the man he was represented as being.

But when he found himself in that frame of mind he was strong enough to fight the weakness, and he steeled his heart against the mysterious influence.

After exchanging a few remarks Banks said:

"I presume you want to see me in private, doctor?"

The detective assured him that he did, whereupon the gentleman arose, excused himself to his daughter and led the way upstairs.

"Now," thought Thad, as they were on their way up-stairs, "I will need all my will power, and I am determined that this fellow shall not exercise his wicked influence over me."

Banks did not speak until they had entered his private office on the second floor, and he had shown his visitor to a seat and closed the door.

"Now," he began, as he seated himself opposite the pretended doctor, "what is the nature of your business, doctor?"

As he spoke he looked the detective straight in the eye with the most piercing pair of eyes the latter had ever seen.

Thad was compelled to think rapidly in order to formulate an answer in time to avoid arousing the other's suspicions.

And he succeeded, as he usually did.

"Perhaps you can tell as well as I," he replied, with a significant look at his interrogator.

"I don't understand you," retorted the other rather sharply.

"As I informed your servant for you, I was sent to you by your brother. By that

I inferred that you have some business in the medical line for me."

Here he repeated the knowing expression, which fell just short of a leer.

The whole thing was a venture, and there was as much chance of its being a failure as a success, but the detective ventured upon it as his only alternative.

And it was fortunately a success.

"Ah, I understand," observed the policy king, with an arch expression. "I presume you have done something for my brother at one time and another?"

"Yes; but not so much for him as for some of his intimates."

"I see. And you have been quite successful, I take it?"

"Enough so that after nearly forty years' practice in the same line, the first whisper of suspicion has yet to be made."

"That is indeed remarkable. Not many doctors in the same line can say as much. I think we can come to terms at once. What is your price?"

"That depends upon the case a good deal," answered Thad gravely. "If there is not much trouble and the one who employs me is fully able to do his part, my charge is reasonable. Say one thousand dollars. In other cases, where there is likely to be any trouble, I am compelled to charge more."

"Your prices are a little high, doctor; but I presume you leave nothing behind for inquisitive people to make trouble about?"

"That I guarantee before I commence operations. I will defy any analytical chemist to find anything irregular after I am done with my patient. In the hundreds of cases where *post-mortems* have been held, the report has always been the same—natural causes."

"Very well. I shall not quarrel with you about the price, if you do the work properly. Come this way and I will show you the patient."

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW PROFESSION.

THAD was oppressed with a momentary misgiving as he followed the policy man from the private office through a succession of halls and up another flight of stairs.

He realized that he was virtually at the mercy of this unprincipled villain, and it was impossible to tell whether he was sincere in his statement that he had "business" for him or not, or whether the shrewd scoundrel, seeing through the detective's disguise and ruse, was using it to further some fiendish plot of his own.

His former opinion about this man being gentle and merciful toward a man in his power had been greatly changed within the past twenty-four hours, through the treatment he had received from the brother, and he believed him capable of anything. And this opinion had been strengthened by the proposition he had made to the so-called doctor to put some victim out of the way.

It was necessary, therefore, for him to exert his will power to its utmost in order to face the present ordeal.

He followed Banks on through hall after hall in the great house, and up another flight of stairs, and finally arrived at a room door, where the smiling villain stopped, turned about and put his finger on his lip.

"Of course," he whispered, "you understand how to treat this matter, doctor?"

"I trust I do," retorted the pretended physician with dignity. "I ought to, after nearly thirty—"

"Pardon me," interrupted the other. "You do not understand me. Of course I know that you understand how to treat the patient so far as your skill as a physician is concerned, but what I was about to say is, that she is to understand that the other doctor having failed, you have been called. And that all through my anxiety that she should get well."

"Of course, of course. I understand all that," answered the detective with a knowing wink. "That is part of the practice."

"Another thing I would suggest—but, of course, you know that too, I presume."

"What is that?"

"The patient is very low now, and I would suggest that your treatment should begin with reviving her, improving her condition

for a few days, so that she may not suspect anything."

"Certainly, certainly," assented the good-natured old "doctor," bowing and smiling. "That is always the thing. By the way, you have had another physician, I take it?"

"Yes—two, in fact, but I have no faith in either of them. They are doing the work, but I can see plainly enough that they are using poisons which can easily be traced by a *post-mortem*, if one should be held."

"Ah! tut tut!" grumbled the "doctor."

"Clumsy fellows. Half of these fellows do not know their business. No doctor who knows anything at all will use mineral poisons, which nothing, even fire, will destroy the traces of, and yet they nearly all do it."

"I see that you are the right person," said Banks approvingly.

And with that he opened the door.

Contrary to Thad's expectation, a real sick-chamber was disclosed to him when he stepped inside.

With all the fellow's talk, he had more than half expected to be deceived, and find some trap for him.

But instead there was a snowy bed with a patient whose face was almost as white as the pillows upon which she reclined.

At a glance the detective, who was well up in medicines, especially poisons, saw that she was slowly wasting away under the influence of arsenic poisoning.

As he took his seat at her bedside and felt her pulse in a professional fashion, he was shocked to find that there was very little life remaining.

He arose and taking Banks to one side, said:

"I want somebody to go and have a prescription filled at once."

"Very well," replied Banks. "Write it out and I will see that it is filled."

Thad then wrote a prescription for one of the most powerful and sure antidotes for arsenic poisoning known to medical science. He then resented himself at the bedside, while the policy king went away to have the prescription filled.

The patient was too weak to talk much, but after gazing for a long time into his kindly face, she whispered:

"Are you the new doctor, sir?"

"Yes, my poor child," he replied in his gentlest tone. "And I shall soon have you better."

She shook her head doubtfully.

"No, no," she murmured scarcely audibly. "I shall never be better. That is what the other two doctors told me, but they only made me worse. That is what he brings them here for. I know it. I have known it all along. But what difference does it make? Life at best is only a great big heart-ache."

The detective started at this expression.

Where had he heard it before?

Then it came to him.

The diary. They were the identical words used by the girl in the very last memorandum she had recorded in her diary.

Then for the first time he examined her face thoroughly.

It was wasted and thin and evidently only a shadow of what it had once been, but there were two features which even disease and death could not change—the eyes and mouth.

They were not only exquisite and characteristic, but the same he had seen in the photograph with the name "Lottie Preston" written under it.

The detective said nothing about the discovery he had made, but soothingly replied to her remarks:

"Oh, yes, my dear, you shall soon be better. I know as well as you that those nasty doctors were trying to kill you, and that is the reason I have come to save and cure you."

She gazed at him with an expression of mingled wonder and doubt for some seconds.

"You have come to save and cure me?" she murmured at last.

"Yes, my child," he replied, kindly.

"Impossible. Why should he want to save me, when he has been trying to kill me?"

"He? Whom?"

She did not reply in words, but gave a scarcely perceptible jerk with her head toward the door, and the detective understood.

"It is not his doings," he answered.
 "Not his doings? What do you mean? He brought you here."
 "Very true, my child. But he does not know my mission. Listen—"

But at this moment the conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door, and when the "doctor" opened it, Banks came in.

"I have sent for the prescription, he said, 'and it will be here in a very few minutes.'"
 "Thanks," returned Thad. "It cannot be here too soon."

"Indeed!"
 And an expression of genuine alarm came into the villain's face.

"One word with you, doctor," he said softly, beckoning the detective aside.

They withdrew to the furthest corner of the large room, and then Banks resumed:

"What do you mean—that she is sinking?"

"That is it," replied the detective, "and if she is not relieved within a few minutes there is no hope for her. And if she dies in this condition, her system loaded with arsenic, nothing in God's world can cover it up."

"Then, for God's sake get it out of her system, doctor, if it is a possible thing, and I will double your fee!"

"That will not be necessary," rejoined Thad. "I will do my best, but I want no more for doing my duty than it is really worth."

"Do you think there is any chance?" almost gasped the other.

"Yes, I really believe if I get that prescription in time I can save her."

"Thanks!"
 And he grasped the detective's hand.

"Now I will ask you to remain with the patient, but you shall have all the assistance you want, doctor. Only bring her out of this, and then you know what to do after that."

"Yes, yes, I know," responded the pretended doctor, with a wise look.

Banks was about to add something else, but at that moment there was a soft rap at the door, and the servant arrived with the preparation which had been put up on Thad's prescription.

"I will leave you now, doctor," said Banks.

"Yes, I prefer to be alone," replied Burr, "but the attendant might remain where I can call her if needed."

Banks and the attendant left the room, and Thad proceeded to administer a large dose of the antidote to the patient.

She took it patiently, doubtless believing that it was some compound which would hurry her along toward the grave.

The detective did not attempt to resume the conversation, and the patient soon fell into a languor which gradually developed into a deep slumber.

It was then late in the afternoon, and when the servant came at six o'clock to ask the "doctor" if he would have his dinner brought up to him, she was still asleep.

Thad had his dinner brought to the room, as he did not wish to give any one a chance to tamper with the patient, and when he had concluded it, he again resumed his seat at the bedside, where he remained except at intervals, when he called in the servant to attend to the wants of the patient.

About nine o'clock the girl awoke.

She looked up at the detective with a quick, animated movement, and there was a decided improvement in her appearance.

"Oh!" she cried. "You still here, sir?"

"Yes, my child," responded the detective kindly. "I shall remain with you until you are cured."

"And you will cure me, too," she said almost gleefully. "I know it. I can see it in your good, kindly eyes. You are not in league with those wicked people, I am sure of it."

"You are right, my dear. But be careful. We may be heard, and that would spoil everything. How do you feel?"

"Splendid!"

"That is good. Do you feel as if you could eat anything?"

"Oh, yes, I am so hungry! But don't let them put anything in the food, will you?"

"Certainly not. You shall have the best of everything, and I shall see that there is

nothing that is not perfectly wholesome in it, my child."

With that he touched a bell, and when the servant arrived the girl was allowed to order whatever she wanted to eat.

"It is so good of you to let me eat whatever I want," she said, when the waiter went away for her supper. "Those other nasty old doctors would only let me eat certain things, and almost starved me."

"That was because they wanted to kill you, while I want to cure you," rejoined Thad.

"I believe it. I know it," she gushed. "I can see it in your good, kind face that you would not, could not harm me."

She was silent for some time and seemed to be busy with her thoughts, and Thad was interested in watching the play of her features from sad to gay, as she went over the varied scenes of her past life, and he, too, fell into a reverie.

But his thoughts had nothing to do with his past. He was thinking of the present and the immediate future, and he was trying in vain to reconcile himself to the situation into which he had fallen by mere chance.

He was still unable to believe fully that Banks, the prince of cunning and finesse, should not have penetrated his disguise or guessed his real motive in coming there.

And under these circumstances it was impossible to guess where it would all end.

At length the servant returned bringing a tray laden with enough provisions for half a dozen persons, and in such variety that the poor invalid did not know where to commence first.

But she ate with great relish, after the detective had propped her up in the bed with pillows, and appeared to be very happy.

For a long time no words passed between them except an occasional exclamation of joy or gratitude on the part of the girl, and she went on with her eating, while the detective had enough to do to watch her and go on thinking, thinking of the strange set of circumstances into which his adventure had brought him.

At length she looked up with a mischievous twinkle in her eye and said, in a queer, bashful voice:

"Doctor, I'd like to ask you something."

"Well, you may," replied he, smiling.

"What is it?"

"Will you answer me?"

"That depends whether I can or not."

"Oh, I know you can, the only question is whether you will or not."

"Yes, if it is something that I can answer, I promise you that I will do it."

"You said awhile ago, when we first talked, that he did not know your mission here, and seemed about to tell me something, when you were interrupted by his entrance. What were you going to tell me? What is your mission?"

"That I have already told you. To save your life."

"I know you told me that," she went on impatiently. "But why? You were employed by him, were you not?"

"Yes."

"And I know that he does not desire that my life should be saved. I do not understand it."

"Then I will tell you, but you must keep it a dead secret, and we must be very cautious that none of the servants is about to overhear what we say."

"I shall say nothing," she promised, "for my life depends upon it, even if I wanted to tell over so much."

"Well, to begin with, I am a detective. I discovered that you were missing in an accidental manner, and, without having the least notion that you were in this house, for the purpose of an excuse for seeing Edward Banks, I pretended to be a doctor—"

"Then you are not a physician?"

"No."

"And yet you propose to cure me, and have made me better already. This is funny."

"Oh, I know enough about medicine to cure a case like yours. I have studied medicine, although I do not claim to be a skillful physician. But what I was about to say is, having announced myself as a physician, and one that was willing to do a dirty job—he employed me at once."

"And that is how you came here?"

"Yes."

"But why did you come to the house in the first place?"

"Ah, that is another matter, and has nothing to do with your case, my child."

"Then, you won't tell me?"

"It can be of no interest to you."

"Maybe I can help you."

Thad was struck with the idea, and concluded that perhaps she could, as there was no telling but she might have known something of what had been done with poor Ned.

CHAPTER XII.

A CLEVER ALLY.

AFTER again pledging the girl to secrecy, the detective related the account of Ned's attempt to arrest the policy king, of his entering this same house, and of his never having been heard of since.

"It is one of the strangest cases in police annals," he observed in conclusion. "This young man was known to be faithful and courageous, and there appears to be but one thing about it, he has met with foul play at the hands of these villains. But the strangest thing about it, I can get no trace of him."

"This was about two weeks ago, you say?" she interpolated.

"Yes, or a little over two weeks."

"I remember. It was one night. He came the day before and the hall boy told him that Mr. Banks did not live here. He went away and again came the next evening. This time he was admitted, and Mr. Banks took him to his private room, where they had a long talk."

"Do you know what became of him after that?"

"No."

"Did you see him while he was here?"

"I just had a glimpse of him as he came up-stairs."

"You would know him if you saw him again, then?"

"Oh, yes, sir, anywhere."

"You did not see him after he went into Mr. Banks's private office, then?"

"No, sir."

"Nor hear any one about the house speak of seeing him?"

"Yes, Stella saw him."

"After he left the room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Does she know whether he left the house or not?"

"Yes, I think she said he left the house. Stella was very much impressed with him, and invited him to call again."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. You see, her father does not allow her to have any beau, and she is ready to fall in love with the first young man who comes along. But she says that this young man was very handsome."

"So he was. But are you sure that he left the house?"

"I only know what she told me."

"Would she have any motive for telling you an untruth?"

"I think not. Besides Estelle is very truthful."

"She is a good girl, then?"

"There never was a better."

"She knows nothing of her father's rascality, then?"

"Certainly not. She believes him to be an angel."

"Has she any suspicion what is the matter with you?"

"She knows that there has been bungling on the part of the doctors, but she does not know that her father is at the bottom of it."

"Did you never tell her, or give her a hint of the facts?"

"Oh, dear, no."

"Why didn't you? It might have been the means of saving your life."

"No, I would rather have died than to have told her, because it would have broken her heart, if she could have been made to believe it."

"You do not believe it likely that she knows anything about what has become of this young man, do you?"

"That I cannot tell, but I shall find out for you if I can."

"Thank you. Now I should like to ask you something, Miss Preston."

The girl looked up quickly with a startled and troubled look.

"Where did you hear that name?" she asked.

"It is your own, is it not?" he asked, instead of answering her question.

"It is, and it isn't."

"What do you mean?"

"I would rather not tell."

"Very well, you need not. But you admit that you were once called that?"

"Yes."

"And what must I call you now?"

"Lottie Banks."

"Then you are married to this man?"

The girl colored violently.

"Why do you ask me that, sir?" she asked in a pitiful tone.

"Because it is necessary for my purpose to know."

She was silent and appeared to be struggling with her emotions.

"Have you heard anything about it?" she finally questioned.

"To be candid with you, I have," he replied. "I have heard a good deal about it."

"Who told you?"

"No one."

"Eh?"

"No one told me."

"Then how did you know about it?"

Thad drew a little memorandum book from his pocket and read the last lines recorded there.

The girl blushed violently.

"What does this mean?" he inquired.

"I cannot tell you—now. Some time I will. Do not ask me to tell you now."

"You can tell me whether you are his wife or not?"

"Legally—I am not," she finally faltered.

"Has he a wife living?"

"He has."

"Is she in this house?"

"Yes."

"Did you not know that before you came here?"

"No, sir, I did not."

"What did you mean by saying in your memorandum that 'the proposition of E. B. is cruel—wicked, but there is nothing else for me?' What did you mean by that?"

The girl burst into tears.

"Oh, do not ask me that!" she wailed piteously. "I must not, cannot, tell you!"

"E. B. means Edward Banks, does it not?" persisted the detective, in the same kindly tone.

"Yes—yes," she stammered.

"Well, you can tell me whether you acceded to this proposition, whatever it was, or not, can't you?"

"I never did—to the proposition referred to in this memorandum," she replied.

"Then you have nothing to be ashamed of. But who is referred to as 'him' where you say, 'it being all over with him,' etc.?"

"That was a—my—"

"Howard Preston," interjected Thad, "was it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was he?"

"My cousin."

"And you were lovers, were you not?"

"Ye—yes, sir," she admitted, coloring violently.

"You had broken off, I presume, at the time you wrote that?"

"Yes, sir."

"What has become of him?"

"I do not know. He went to South America, but I don't know what ever became of him."

"You used to live with Thomas Banks, didn't you?"

She looked up in surprise, and then smiled slightly, which was very surprising to the detective, but she finally answered rather mechanically, he thought:

"Yes, sir."

"He is your brother-in-law, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, still mechanically, as if humoring his theory rather than answering his question honestly.

"How long has it been since you left there?"

"About a year."

"About the time, then, that you wrote that memorandum?"

"A few days after."

"Did Thomas Banks know where you were going?"

"Certainly—that is—no, sir, I believe not."

Her confusion at this point convinced the detective more than ever that she was not telling him the truth, but he affected not to notice it, and continued:

"You say that you did not accede to the proposition, whatever it was, of Edward Banks?"

"No, sir, I did not."

"Then you have done nothing wrong?"

"No, sir, nothing that I am ashamed of."

"Still, there was a marriage ceremony performed, which you supposed to be genuine until you came here?"

She hesitated for some time, but finally replied:

"There seems to be no use for me to deny anything, as you know everything."

"Then you admit the truth of this?"

"Yes, sir."

"Does Estelle know anything about this matter?"

"Yes, sir. She knows all my secrets, and it was through her that I was enabled to remain a good girl."

"Is it for that reason that he wishes to put you out of the way, do you think?"

"I presume it is."

"Did he ever say anything that would lead you to believe that he would like to put you out of the way?"

"Yes, sir, frequently. Only a week ago he said that he wished I was out of his way."

"Why did he say that?"

"Because I would not do as he wanted me to."

"What did you mean when you said in this memorandum that you supposed he would soon get tired of you, and that you would then go the way of all the rest?"

"Why, it is said that he has killed previous wives."

"Is this true?"

"I do not know whether it is true or not, but that is what is said."

"Is his present wife a young woman?"

"Yes, sir—not much older than myself."

They were interrupted at this point by the waiter who came to remove the tray of dishes, and after his departure the detective laid the patient down again.

They talked on for some time, and then Thad administered another dose of the antidote, which soon put her to sleep, and he beguiled the time with reading a book which he found in the room.

After a little he fell to musing over the past few days, and suddenly a thought came to him which he had overlooked before.

According to the girl's story that of the lawyer in regard to Howard Preston appeared to have been nearly correct.

Why, then, had he related it to the detective? And having done so, was it not likely that he had actually mistaken Thad for the other man, and consequently his boast that he had known the detective all the time and knew he was coming, was a lie?

There was another thing that puzzled him, and that was with regard to the two brothers Banks.

While the lawyer was telling him about Ned coming to the house to arrest Edward, he first said "to arrest me," and then corrected himself and said "my brother."

Again the girl's surprise and apparent amusement when he spoke to her about Thomas Banks.

Putting the two incidents together, he could but believe that there was some mystery behind it all.

Could it be possible that Thomas Banks and Edward Banks were one and the same person?

But at this point the policy king arrived to ask him if he did not wish to retire and allow one of the servants to sit up with the patient.

Thad declined the offer, saying that he would prefer not to leave her for the night and that he could sleep all he desired or required in his chair.

Banks insisted, but the detective would not hear to it, and finally he was left to himself once more, and so he spent the night, dozing for a few moments at a time, and then waking, and administering the patient's medicine at the proper intervals.

The following morning found her greatly improved, so much so, that when Banks

came up during the forenoon he was surprised at her improved condition, and insisted upon a private interview with the so-called doctor.

As soon as they entered the private office Banks began:

"I see that you are bringing the girl around all right, doctor. How long do you think it will be before you will have all the poison out of her system?"

"A few days at most," replied Thad.

"It will not be till then, I presume, that you will begin your own treatment?"

"No, it will not be polite to begin until all the poison is out of her system."

"And how long will it take to do your part of the work, when you once set to work?"

"That depends something upon the constitution of the patient. In her case, I should say, about a week to do the thing properly, so that there may be no bungling."

"About a week, eh?"

"Yes, about that, possibly a little more, possibly a little less, but approximately that."

"Say, then, about two weeks from this time, before the thing is complete?"

"About that."

"That is very satisfactory. I feel that I have done well to have employed you. Only I have found that you made one misstatement when you came to me, but I shall take no note of it, provided every thing else proves satisfactory."

"What was that?" asked Thad, slightly nervous, for he feared the fellow had discovered his real identity.

"It makes no particular difference, and it will probably be as well not to speak of it."

"But I should like to know. You have as good as said that I had told you an untruth, and I wish to know what you refer to."

"Very well, as you insist upon it. You told me when you came here that you had been sent by my brother, and I find that my brother knows nothing about you, indeed, never heard of you."

"Pardon me," interposed Thad, struggling for a subterfuge. "If you remember, I did not say that your brother had sent me, but that I was sent by—or as I should have said—through him. It was his clerk that told me. As for your brother knowing me, I have not the least doubt that he does not remember me by the name I gave you. You must know that practitioners of my stripe cannot afford to pass under their own names, or the same fictitious names twice in succession."

"Ah, I see. You did not give me your right name?"

"Certainly not, and more than that, when you see me the next time, that is after I leave you, you would not know me from Adam."

"And very wise you are to pursue this course," replied the policy man, smiling blandly. "It saves trouble all around."

CHAPTER XIII.

INCREASE OF PRACTICE.

THE policy king was so well pleased to find a man, as he supposed, who was as great a rogue as he was himself, that he laughed very heartily, and shook the detective by the hand with great cordiality.

"You are a bright fellow, doctor," he exclaimed over and over again. "It's a real pleasure to meet a person like you. I think we shall be great friends."

"Yes," pursued Thad. "This manner of doing business saves a great deal of trouble. For instance, if anything should happen and you were subpoenaed to-morrow, you and all your domestics, not one of you could swear that you had ever seen me before."

"True enough, true enough. None of us could, and therefore they could not make a case against us. You're a clever chap, a deuced clever chap. And now that we understand each other, and can trust each other, I want to let you into a little secret, or tell you rather that I have another case for you."

"Another?" cried Thad eagerly, for he believed he knew who the party was.

"Yes," laughed the other. "Did you imagine I was only able to produce one case—a man like me?"

"Oh, I believed you capable of it, if anybody was. But who or what is the case?"

"That you must not know at present. But I will take you to the patient as soon as you think it safe to leave the present one. How soon will that be?"

"That depends upon how long you will require me to be away."

"Well, that I cannot tell. By the way, could you not manage them both at once?"

"Perhaps—if they were both near together, there would be no trouble about it."

"That is the trouble. They are not near together, but will it be possible to have them close together?"

"I don't know how it would be then."

"Couldn't you prescribe for the other one and let some one else attend him?"

"Him?"

"The patient, I mean," intercepted the villain, correcting himself and growing a little confused over his slip.

"No, I could not consent to that," answered Thad. "I would not think of taking the responsibility of a case without attending the patient personally. But I'll tell you what I might do, I might go back and forth from one to the other, leaving some one to attend them in my absence."

"Then we will do that."

"Or if you are in no hurry about this last one, we might defer his case until we are through with this one."

"No, I would rather not wait," answered the other impatiently. "It is important that it should be attended to as soon as possible."

"Very well. I think by to-morrow I can leave this one long enough to make a visit of an hour or so."

"Thanks. Say about dark in the evening."

"That will suit me as well as any time," rejoined the detective. "My time is at your disposal."

Burr then returned to his patient, whom he found still further improved, and she was eager to know what had passed between the detective and Banks.

"You didn't say anything about our conversation, did you?" she asked as soon as he was again seated at her bedside.

"Certainly not," he replied. "Do you think I am seeking my own destruction?"

"No, I might have known you did not, but what were you talking about?"

"Oh, he was anxious to know how long it would take to get rid of you."

"He really thinks you intend to kill me, then?"

"Certainly, that is what he employed me for."

"Isn't he surprised that I am getting better instead of worse?"

"No, that is a part of the programme. You see these other doctors were poisoning you with arsenic, and if you had died from that it would have been easy for the police to have discovered the cause of death, and it would have gone hard with Banks. So I told him that the first thing to be done was to get the poison out of your system before beginning my operations."

"How clever you are," laughed the girl. "It will be so easy to deceive him now!"

"Very. But what is your plan after I restore you enough so that you can travel?"

"Just as soon as I am well enough to get out I want you to help me to escape from this place—Stella will help us too—and I shall go to some friends of mine."

"Where are they, in the city?"

"No, they live in St. Louis."

"You say that Stella will help us. Then she must be a very good friend?"

"Indeed, she is."

"And yet she has never been to see you since I have been here."

"That is because her father prevents her from coming."

"Do you know this to be a fact?"

"Yes, the last time she came up she told me that she had slipped in, as her father and mother—step-mother, rather—had forbidden her to come to see me."

"Why is that, I wonder?"

"They are afraid that she will discover the cause of my illness, I suppose."

"If she knew, you suppose she would say anything about it to them?"

"She would be sure to. She would raise the biggest rumpus you ever heard of."

"Has she any influence with them?"

"Yes, she has her own way in everything, and the only way they can do anything of this kind is to keep her in ignorance of it."

"But you said just now that they would not let her come up."

"That is true," said the girl, with a perplexed countenance. "I don't understand how it is, for she has her own way in nearly everything."

"Possibly she does not want to come, and uses that as an excuse," suggested the detective.

"I do not believe that."

"I wonder if there would be any chance of having a talk with her. Is she ever alone?"

"Yes, sometimes. Perhaps, if you can find out when her parents are away you might get her up here and have a talk with her."

"When are they away?"

"He goes out every forenoon, and she goes out a good deal. Ask some of the servants to-morrow afternoon whether she is at home or not—the step-mother, I mean—and if she is, you will be safe in going to her room, or perhaps she would be in the parlor down-stairs. She sits there a good deal."

"There is another thing in which, according to what you said yesterday, she does not always have her own way."

"What is that?"

"You said her father did not allow her to have company."

"Well, in that she does not have her own way, it is true. But in most things she does."

But in spite of her explanation, the detective was inclined, from this, coupled with some other things she had said, to think that the girl was in the habit of telling untruths occasionally.

Another weary night for Thad passed, sleeping in his chair, when he slept at all, and the following morning found him pretty well worn out. But he was too well used to losing sleep to mind a thing of that kind, when he was on the way to success, as he believed he was at the present time.

A little after noon, when the servant came to bring him his lunch he inquired if Mrs. Banks, whom he had never seen up to this time, was at home, and was told that she was not.

As soon, therefore, as he had finished his lunch, he slipped out of the room and went down to the parlor.

As Lottie had predicted, he found Stella there, and requested her to come up to the sick room.

"Is Lottie any worse?" she asked anxiously.

"On the contrary, she is much better, and would like to see you," answered Thad.

"Tell her I will be up right away."

Burr then went back and waited, but Stella did not put in an appearance.

"It is as I suspected," said he. "She has no excuse for not coming now, and yet you see she does not come."

"Perhaps something has occurred to prevent her," suggested the girl. "She may have had a caller, or her step-mother may have returned. I know she would come if there had not been something to keep her from it."

Thad did not deem it worth his while to dispute her opinion, and allowed the matter to drop.

The afternoon wore on, and a short time after dinner—about eight o'clock, in fact—Banks came in and requested another private interview.

As soon as they were again in the private office Banks said:

"Everything is ready. Let us go."

"Very well," returned the detective.

"Let me return to my patient and give her a dose of medicine. That will put her to sleep, and she will be all right till I come back."

Burr returned to the sick room and administered the medicine, and telling the patient he was compelled to go out for a short time, left her in the care of a servant.

When he again joined the policy king that gentleman was ready to start, and they descended to the street and entered a closed carriage which was waiting at the curb.

The night was cool, and, at the suggestion of Banks, Thad wrapped himself in a great cloak which had been provided for him.

To the detective's surprise, the carriage drove up-town when it started, and continued in this direction for a long ways, he was unable to tell exactly how far, the night being very dark and the curtains of the carriage being closely drawn.

After they had traveled for something like a half-hour, during which time the two men had conversed on various topics, the vehicle suddenly stopped, and Banks opened a dark lantern which he had put under the seat lit, and turning to Thad said:

"Now, doctor, before we proceed any further, I want to make a request of you."

"What is that?" inquired the detective curiously.

By way of answer the fellow drew out what looked like a hangman's cap or hood made of black cloth, and said:

"I want to ask you to put this over your head before we proceed any further."

"What is that for?" inquired the detective, a little startled at the strange request.

"It is plain enough, I should think," answered the other a trifle gruffly. "I do not wish you to see where you are going. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, I understand. But suppose I do not choose to allow myself to be blindfolded?"

"In that case we will go no further, and you will lose the case I desire you to attend to."

Burr reflected a moment.

He was risking a great deal in allowing himself to be hoodwinked by this heartless scoundrel, he knew, and yet he did not like to miss the opportunity of seeing the other victim, whom he believed to be a person he was anxious to rescue.

He was perplexed for some time as to what course to pursue.

While he was trying to make up his mind, the other resumed:

"Remember, if you go you shall have the same amount for this case as I am paying you for the other."

"That is a great inducement," admitted the so-called doctor, "but it is strange you cannot trust to my honor in this case as well as in the other."

"That is my affair," retorted the rascal coldly. "Either you will consent to being blindfolded, or you won't go, that is all."

After another season of reflection, the detective responded:

"As you say, then, but I am putting great store by your honor in submitting to this."

"So far as that is concerned, sir," retorted the other sharply, "you are already in possession of too many of my secrets, and I have too much for you to do for me to afford to act otherwise than honorably by you."

Thad considered that there was a good deal of truth in this, and made no further objection to the hoodwinking.

Banks then drew the cap over his head, which dropped as far down as his shoulders, and was secured in place by a strap which buckled closely around the neck, preventing the possibility of his removing it without assistance.

There were two holes for breathing, one over the mouth and the other over the nostrils, but the eyes were completely covered, so that it was impossible to tell which way he was going.

The carriage then proceeded on its way, and for fully half an hour longer it rolled along.

Thad listened to see if the wheels were still passing over the city streets, and was assured that they were.

Thus he knew that the driving in the direction of the country had only been a ruse, and that in all probability they had turned and were retracing their course.

As soon as he had got the detective blindfolded Banks became very cheerful, and chatted along constantly on various subjects, but Thad was in no humor for conversation, besides he was too busy listening at the tell-tall wheels.

On and on rolled the carriage, still crunching and creaking over the stones, and from the time they had been traveling the detective concluded that they were very nearly in the vicinity of the Battery or else that they

were driving up one street and down another.

At length, however, the vehicle stopped, and Banks threw open the door and climbed out.

He then took the detective's hand and assisted him to alight.

Thad would have given a good deal at that moment to have had that hood off his head so that he could have seen where he was, but this was out of the question, and he allowed himself to be led along until he felt his feet upon a floor and knew they had entered a building.

Presently he was ascending a flight of stairs, the other man still holding him by the hand and directing his course.

The thickness of the hood prevented the slightest ray of light from coming to his eyes, and for aught he could see he might have been walking through a dungeon.

At length they reached the top of the stairs, and then after a short walk along a level floor, he felt himself ascending a second flight of stairs.

When that was accomplished, and another walk along a level floor for some distance, they stopped and the guide put a key into a lock.

Thad was then led into a room, and after a time the hood removed from his eyes.

He was in a large room, dimly lighted, and there on a bed before him lay the young detective Ned Preston!

CHAPTER XIV.

RECOGNITIONS AND PLOTS.

ALTHOUGH Thad had vaguely anticipated that the mysterious patient would turn out to be none other than the young detective, he was nevertheless startled when he found him in this place.

Perhaps it was the young man's condition, however, more than the mere fact of finding him, that produced the shock.

The last time he had seen Ned he was rugged and robust, the very picture of youthful health and vigor. Now he found him thin, pallid and wasted—a mere shadow of his former self.

How could he have been so reduced in two weeks?

And the detective was more than anxious to have a talk with the younger man and ascertain how he came in this place and condition.

He sat down by the bedside and took the patient's wrist in a professional way, and felt his pulse.

Like the girl when he had first seen her, he was very far gone.

Evidently he was suffering from the same species of poisoning as she had been.

Taking this for granted, he wrote the same prescription he had done for her, and asked Banks to have it filled as soon as possible.

Banks took the prescription, and then called the "doctor" out to speak to him in private.

As soon as they were alone he commenced:

"What are the conditions, doctor?"

"About the same as in the other case—arsenic poisoning," replied Thad.

"That is what I feared," said the other. "I suppose the same treatment will have to be gone through with as in the other case?"

"Undoubtedly, unless you are not particular how this one passes away."

"But I am particular. There is so much investigating going on now that I don't care to be mixed up in any poisoning cases."

"Then we shall simply have to proceed as we did in the other case, purge the system of this arsenic, and then go on with the other treatment."

"Very well, I'll have this prescription put up."

With that he called a servant and sent him away for the medicine, and then he and the "doctor" returned to the sick chamber.

Thad was in a quandary how to get rid of Banks, so that he could have a talk with Ned.

At length the medicine arrived, and, after administering a dose to the patient, he turned to Banks and said:

"You will pardon me, Mr. Banks, but there are points in my treatment which I do not care to reveal to the world in general,

and for that reason I must ask to be left alone."

"Ah, very well," responded the other, rising. "I shall withdraw. How long will you require to be alone?"

"Two hours, perhaps."

"Two hours," mused the other, consulting his watch. "It is now just nine. Suppose I call for you at eleven?"

"That will do."

"Very well. I shall call for you at that time."

With that he left the room and, to Thad's consternation, locked the door.

The detective was in a quandary.

He wondered whether the fellow would go away entirely, or stop somewhere within earshot and listen to what he might have to say to the patient.

After a little reflection in this direction he arose and tiptoed noiselessly to the door and put his ear against it.

He listened attentively, but could hear no sound outside, and finally concluded that there was nobody there.

He then made an investigation of the apartment, or suite, for there were three rooms altogether.

In one of these rooms he found a servant asleep in his chair.

His first thought was to arouse the fellow and compel him to leave the place, but then he thought of the door being locked and that the menial could not escape, so he resorted to a much simpler and safer method. He saturated his handkerchief with chloroform and held it over the fellow's nose for a minute or two, until his head dropped upon his bosom limp and lifeless—at least for the time being, and then the detective knew that there would be no trouble in that direction.

He then took a heavy blanket which he found in the room and pinned it over the door to deaden the sound.

Believing he was now safe from intrusion, the detective again seated himself at the bedside and took the patient's hand in his own.

Ned was rapidly sinking into a state of coma, but as Thad wished to have a talk with him before he became unconscious, he gave him a mild stimulant which would have the effect of arousing him without interfering with the potion already administered.

As the young man revived Thad bent over him and whispered.

"Ned, how do you feel now?"

The young man looked up in surprise and stared at his questioner curiously.

"Of course you do not know me, my boy," continued the kind-hearted detective, "but I know you very well."

"No, I do not know you," replied the young man in a feeble voice. "I never saw you before that I know of."

"Yes, you have often seen me, my boy, and when I tell you who I am you will remember me, for we have had several adventures together in the detective line. I am known at Police Headquarters as Thad Burr."

The boy started at the name and clutched the older detective by the arm, at the same time a thrill could be felt running over his frame.

"Thad Burr?" he gasped. "My God! How did you get here?"

"Through stratagem, of course, but be cautious. We may be overheard."

"But I thought you were a doctor," persisted the other, unable to get over his surprise at finding the alleged physician to be his old friend. "Does he think you are a doctor?"

"If he did not, my boy, I would not be here at this moment. But what I want to know is, how did you get here?"

"Overheard," murmured the boy wearily, tossing his head on the pillow. "How shall I ever tell you how I came here?"

"Briefly, my boy. Do not attempt to go into details. Just give me an outline of your adventure. But first tell me where we are."

"That I know no more than you. But truly, don't you know where this place is?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"That is funny."

"Not very, when you consider that I was brought here blindfolded."

"Blindfolded?"

"Yes."

"Just the same as I was brought."

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"What excuse had he for bringing you blindfolded?"

"Well, I'll tell you. But I had better begin at the first."

"Yes, begin at the first, my boy."

"I suppose you know that I was detailed on the case of the policy shops?"

"Yes, I know, and were making very good headway, so the superintendent informed me."

"Pretty fair, I think. Anyway, I had located all the places and procured sufficient evidence to justify me in arresting the proprietor, whom I found to be Edward Banks. So I procured a warrant and went to his house for the purpose of serving the warrant."

"And that was the last we ever heard of you," interposed Burr.

"I have no doubt."

"Go on."

"To my surprise, instead of attempting to give me the slip or resist me, I found a warm reception at the house, the servant at the door telling me that Mr. Banks wished to see me. And when I entered the parlor his daughter, as pretty a girl as I ever laid eyes upon, received me in as cordial a manner as I was ever received in my life. Well, pretty soon the old man came down, shook hands with me and asked about my health as if he had known me all his life."

"Didn't you suspect something wrong from all this?" interrupted Thad.

"Certainly. I knew from the very moment the servant told me the old man wanted to see me that there was trickery behind it all, but, I don't know how it was. Partly from my eagerness to get at the old rascal and partly out of curiosity, it must have been, I walked right into the trap."

"But when you met him?"

"I am coming to that," persisted Ned, impatiently. "The old man said he believed I wanted to see him on business, and I told him I did, thinking that when I got him alone I would serve the papers on him and get the drop on him if possible. Well, he led me up-stairs to what he called his private office, and there had me sit down. Then he told me that he knew who I was, and that he knew I had a warrant in my pocket for him."

"Which you admitted, of course?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He smiled in that sweet way of his, and told me to arrest him, that he was ready to go with me."

"You don't say!"

"Fact, I assure you."

"Then what did you do?"

"Do? I could do nothing. At first I thought he might have a whole regiment of guards concealed somewhere behind those heavy curtains, and told him as much, but he assured me that there was not a soul in the house except the servants, and that if I wished to arrest him, there would be no resistance, but that he knew I would not do it, as I loved him too much, as he did me, and a whole lot of similar stuff."

"Well?" asked the detective, greatly interested.

"Well, he had told the truth. I could no more have arrested him at that moment than I could my mother or my dearest friend. I never in all my life felt toward any person quite as I felt toward him at that time. I know I must have been hypnotized, but to tell you the truth I absolutely loved and adored him as I never had any person in the world."

"This is most remarkable!"

"It is. You may understand the state my mind, when I tell you that he actually put out his wrists to receive the handcuffs, and I recoiled from the task as I might from polluting an angel or striking an infant."

"Well, what happened next?"

"Finding he had me completely in his power, he began to talk about his business and how much money he was making out of it, and finally asked me if I did not want to go in with him."

"What did you answer?"

"Out of pure love for him, rather than any desire to enter into the swindling scheme, I agreed to do so, and then we had something to eat and something to drink, and finally he proposed that we visit one of his

places that I might see the operations, and I consented.

"We took a closed carriage and drove off in the direction of Harlem, which I thought nothing of, as I knew he had several places up that way, but after we had gone some distance, what does he do but flash up a lantern all of a sudden, and then take out a sort of a cap or blindfold and propose to put it on me."

"What did you do?" asked Thad, laughing, as he recalled his own recent adventure.

"I objected, of course, but he insisted, and said that, while he had the greatest confidence in me, he would prefer to be on the safe side, and that until he was better acquainted with me and had put my loyalty to the test, he could not afford to allow me to enter his secret places openly. He also reminded me that I was or had been a detective, and that, in an evil moment, I might be tempted by the big reward offered for him and give him up. He preferred, therefore, not to let me know the location of the place to which we were going."

"So you permitted yourself to be hoodwinked?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Well, as soon as he got me blindfolded the carriage drove on, and after a while we reached a place—I have no idea where it was—and I was led in, still blindfolded."

"Was it this place?" asked Thad.

"I cannot tell. I have thought it might have been in this building, but I do not know for certain. Then I was restored to light, and saw all the workings of the great swindling games, and he told me many of his profoundest secrets."

"He did?"

"Yes. You see, it is my opinion that he had really taken a fancy to me at that time, and everything would have gone on all right, if my curiosity had not got the better of me."

"How was that?"

"Why, after I had seen all there was to be seen, I all at once took an irresistible notion to find out where this place was located and to get away, so I gave him the slip, and before he was aware of it was just going down the second flight of stairs, when it seems he must have missed me, and came running after me. And then in the gentlest manner in the world, he asked me to come back, as he had something else to show me. I couldn't resist him, and went back."

"We entered a room where there was an elegant meal laid out, and he asked me to sit down. I was hungry and accepted the invitation. But I did not eat anything."

"No?"

"No, the first glass of wine I drank I became unconscious, and the next thing I knew I was here in this bed."

CHAPTER XV.

SCHEMING AGAINST A SCHEMER.

THAD thought he heard a noise at the door, and put his hand on his young friend to silence him.

Tiptoeing to the door he listened, but could hear nothing, and so concluded that he had been mistaken, and returned to the bedside.

"And so you've been here ever since, eh?" said the detective.

"Yes, ever since," replied Ned. "And I suppose I should have staid here till they took me out in a box if it had not been for you. But I say, Mr. Burr, what was that you gave me first?"

"That was an antidote for the poison they have been giving you."

"Then they really have been poisoning me, have they?"

"Yes. Didn't you know it?"

"I suspected as much, but I didn't know it."

"Did the doctor tell you what was the matter with you?"

"Yes, he said I had malaria. But how came the old man to change and get you?"

"He was afraid to let them poison you for fear the poison might be traced after your death, and as I represented myself as a doctor who was able to kill you in such a way that they never could tell but what you came to your death by natural causes, he jumped at me."

"Well, what do you propose to do with me?" asked the boy, anxiously.

"I propose to cure you and then get you out of here."

"Do you know enough about medicine for that? But pardon me. I know you do."

"Yes, my boy, I know enough about medicine to manage your case. But how do you feel?"

"Much better since I took that medicine."

"That is good. Now, this fellow is to be back for me in two hours, and I suppose I will be taken back to his house, but I will have charge of you until you are able to be up, and then we must concoct some scheme to get out of here."

"Scheme to beat a schemer, eh?"

"Yes."

"But will not he suspect something when he sees that I am getting better all the time?"

"No, he knows that I have to get the poison out of your system, and that you will improve for awhile. And then, before he has time to suspect anything after that we must carry out our plot."

"I had better not let him know that I am so much better, had I?"

"You can let him know that you are getting better for awhile, and then when he thinks I am giving you the killer, you can pretend to be getting worse. I will arrange that. But I must prepare to receive him, as he will soon be back."

Thad removed the blanket from the door, and then, after administering another dose to the patient, settled down to await Banks's return.

He had not long to wait before the great rascal came in, smiling and bowing as usual.

"How is our patient?" he inquired.

"Much better, I believe," returned Thad.

"I am glad of that. I hope we shall soon have him out of here now. How do you feel, young man?" he went on, addressing Ned.

"First rate sir, thanks," replied the young man.

"Ah, there is nothing like having a good doctor! If we had had the doctor here at first you would have been out before this."

"There is no doubt of it," rejoined Ned. And he believed it, as did also Burr.

"Are you ready to go, doctor?" asked Banks.

"All ready," answered Thad.

Banks stepped into the adjoining room to call the servant who was in attendance upon Ned, and he had a difficult job of arousing him from his stupor, as he was still under the influence of chloroform, but he finally succeeded by dint of cuffing, shaking and kicking.

"I don't know what is the matter with the stupid fellow," growled Banks. "I never saw him quite so sluggish. I believe he has been drinking."

Thad could have told him another story if he had been inclined, but he preferred to let the boss believe the fellow had been drinking, and they left the place, but not until Banks had adjusted the hood on his head so that he could not see where he was going.

When they were again in the carriage Thad thought he would question Banks a little with regard to the last patient and see what sort of a story he would tell.

"Who is the young man, Mr. Banks?" he inquired, not expecting to receive a truthful answer.

"Why, he's a detective," replied the policy man.

The answer was a great surprise to Thad, and set him to thinking. And there was one point which he could not help noticing, and that was that Banks, so far as he had been able to learn, had always told him the truth, a rare quality in a man of his stripe.

"A detective?" exclaimed the detective, affecting great surprise at the discovery.

"Yes, a detective, and a very clever one, I believe."

"One you had in your employ, I presume?"

"Not exactly. I should have employed him, for I took a great fancy to the boy, had he not proved himself to be a traitor, and that means but one thing with me—death!"

"Oh, he was not trustworthy, eh?"

"No. As I say, I had taken a great fancy to him, and intended to employ him, perhaps give him a share in the business, but

just when he had got an insight into the business, and gained possession of some of my most cherished secrets, I discovered him trying to sneak away, with a view to reporting, no doubt, what he had learned to the police. That was enough. He shall never leave that room alive. I cannot afford to let him."

Burr concluded to test his truthfulness a little further.

"How did you come to get hold of the fellow, Mr. Banks?" he inquired.

The policy king laughed as though he enjoyed the thought of how cleverly he had outwitted the keen young detective.

"There was something funny about that," he said. "The fellow had a warrant for my arrest, and actually had the assurance to come to my house to serve it on me."

"You don't say!" ejaculated Thad, as though greatly astonished. "He must be an impudent fellow!"

"Impudent? Not only impudent, doctor, but brave. That is what warned me to ward him. Just think of a boy—he is but a mere boy—coming to my house alone, with a view to arresting me!"

"It was a brave act, but foolhardy."

"Yes, but the boy has the right stuff in him, and I would have made his fortune if he hadn't proven a traitor. If he had got the drop on me while we were together, drawn on me and made me throw up my hands, and then either put the darbies on me or walked off, I shouldn't have said a word. Or if he had been an ordinary coward and given me the slip, I shouldn't have thought anything of it. But for a chap like that, whom a fellow takes to his heart, to try to sneak away! Why, he deserves nothing but death."

"And we'll give it to him, eh, Mr. Banks?" laughed the detective. "We'll give it to him, eh?"

"That we will, or any other traitor that comes in our way," the other laughed. "I think we will get on exceedingly well, eh, doctor?"

"Indeed, we shall. By the way, I presume you have a good deal of trouble with detectives, don't you, Mr. Banks?"

"Trouble? No. I have no trouble with them. If they come in my way I generally make trouble for them. It is all on their side. They have the trouble, not I."

"Of course you are too keen for them," chuckled the detective, seeing that the rascal's weak point was flattery. "They would stand no show with you."

"Why, just think of it! A fellow by the name of Burr, who is considered one of the sharpest men on the force, came to—went to my brother, I mean—the other day for the purpose of finding out something about me. He bore a striking resemblance to a cousin of his wife named Howard Preston—so much so, indeed, that my brother really mistook him for Preston and invited him to his house. But in the mean time a friend of his had discovered that the fellow was a detective, and told my brother. As soon as he discovered the fact he let me know and I took care of Mr. Detective."

"Kill him?"

"Not exactly, but he'll never trouble anybody else, unless he does it through his spirit."

"He must be dead, then?"

"If he is not, it is only a matter of time when he will be."

"You interest me exceedingly and arouse my curiosity," muttered Thad. "Can it be that you have some method more potent than my own? I confess that I am anxious for my own reputation."

This tickled the old rascal exceedingly.

The idea of a man whom he imagined to be an expert in the matter of spitting people away without leaving a trace, flattering him, was evidently very soothing to him.

"Well," he said, laughing, "I don't mind telling you how we disposed of him. In the first place, we left him alone in a room, and, although the door was not locked, the exits to the house were guarded so that there was no chance for escape. A good dinner was provided with plenty of good wine and spirits. As a result, the fellow soon fell asleep, and then he was chloroformed and carried, chair and all, to a place we have for that purpose, being a sort of cistern, walled with stone and about thirty feet deep."

"Filled with water?" interposed Thad.

"Oh, no, it is dry. It would be too easy a death if we only drowned him. No, the cistern is dry, but it is only a matter of time when he will starve to death."

"There is no possibility of his climbing out, I suppose?"

"If you saw how the place is arranged you wouldn't think so."

"How is that?"

"Well, in addition to the wall being perpendicular and impossible to scale, with the facilities of a man thrown in as he was, the walls were lined with dynamite shells, hung around in a line and so close together that it would be absolutely impossible for him to pass them, if he attempted to climb the wall, without exploding some of them."

"Has he attempted to get out, so far as you know?"

"Not so far as I know, but it is safe to say that he has not, for if he had there would have been heard an explosion."

"Which would only hasten his death, eh?"

"Yes."

"Do you suppose he knows the existence of these shells?"

"It isn't likely, as the cistern is as dark as a dungeon. But the chances are that, finding the nature of the walls, he has made no attempt to get out."

"So you have him safe, at all events."

"Yes, indeed."

"Have you ever put anybody in there before?"

"Oh, yes, plenty of them."

"And no one ever escaped, I suppose."

"Never."

"When you have disposed of a few more detectives, they will be likely to let you alone, won't they?"

"I should think they might," laughed Banks.

By this time they had reached the house, and Banks removed the hood from Thad's head, after which they alighted from the carriage and entered the house.

Burr found his patient asleep and did not disturb her, but took his seat at her bedside with the intention of watching her for the remainder of the night.

But Banks soon came in and insisted upon the "doctor" retiring to another room and taking a little sleep.

The detective finally consented to this, being satisfied by this time that the policy king did not suspect his identity.

He went to bed for the first time in three nights, and slept soundly till ten o'clock the next morning, when he awoke refreshed and ready to undertake the great task before him.

This task—the restoring of two helpless fellow-creatures to health and liberty—he realized to be an arduous one, and one that would call for his utmost skill and caution.

The slightest slip would not only result in failure, but in his own death. Therefore he must bring to play his finest wits and discretion.

On returning to the sick chamber after breakfast, he found the patient so much improved that she insisted upon sitting up.

"I shall soon be well under your treatment, doctor," she said, cheerfully.

"Yes, it won't take long now," he answered. "But you take great care to not overtax yourself at first."

And then, a little while after, when they were alone, she continued:

"He will expect me to relapse pretty soon, won't he?"

"Yes, as soon as I announce that the poison is out of your system he will then look for the relapse under what he thinks will be my own treatment. But that will never come."

"How shall you manage it?"

"Why, you see, I have put the time of your recovery far enough away as to give us time to formulate some plan of escape, and before the time comes when he will expect you to begin to get worse we must carry it into execution. By the way, have you had a visit from Stella yet?"

"No, sir."

"Well, are you not pretty well convinced by this time that she is no friend?"

"No, sir. On the contrary, I know that she is a friend, and a true one, and when we are ready to act, she will be with us."

"How do you know this?"

By way of answer she took a small crumpled note from beneath the bedclothes and handed it to the detective.

He unfolded it curiously, and found the following, written in pencil in a diminutive hand:

"DEAR LOTTIE:—

"Keep up a good heart. All will come out well. I know it. The man who is with you—the 'doctor'—will take care of you and get you out of your troubles. He is to be trusted. Show him this, that he may know there is a friend near by, and then destroy it. I must keep quiet and out of sight, but when the time comes you may depend upon me."

"STELLA."

"Now are you satisfied?" she asked with an arch smile, taking the note and tearing it into minute particles.

"That looks encouraging," replied the detective. "But how in the world did she discover who I am?"

"That I cannot tell. She is very sly though, and may have some of the servants on her side."

"This renders our position the more hazardous, though," he said, with a troubled countenance. "I had hoped that our secret was confined to ourselves."

"It is just as safe in her hands, you may depend upon it," she returned, reassuringly.

"Possibly," he interjected doubtfully.

"But what puzzles me is how she got possession of this knowledge. You have told no one, have you?"

"Certainly not," she replied blushing with a little indignation. "Why should I?"

But having caught her in several untruths before he was loth to trust her.

CHAPTER XVI.

MANEUVERING.

At about eight o'clock in the evening Banks came in to say that the carriage was ready to take the "doctor" to his other patient.

The same ceremonies were gone through with as before, and the detective reached the place without discovering where it was located, as on the former occasion.

As on the previous visit, the policy man left him for two hours, locking the door behind him when he went out.

Burr took the same precautions, too, to prevent any one on the outside of the door overhearing whatever conversation might go on inside, by hanging a blanket over the door.

Ned was greatly improved in condition, so much so that he was sanguine of being able to put into execution the plot formulated the previous night in a very short time.

"I think I could undertake the business to-morrow, if you are ready," he suggested.

"No, not so soon my boy," answered Thad. "You are too weak yet. Besides there are considerations. I have two jobs on hand, and must work them both at once, for if one fails, both will be failures."

"What is the other one?" asked Ned eagerly.

"I didn't tell you about it last night because we had so much else to talk about."

"What is it?"

"There is a girl over at Banks's house who is in about the same condition as yourself. She was worse than you were to begin with, but I've got her pretty well along toward recovery now."

"Is this fellow trying to poison her too?"

"He was, but as in your case, he got scared lest they should discover his crime if she died in that way, and secured me to do the thing up in a more scientific manner."

"And you want to get her out also, eh?"

"Yes, and the worst of it is, it must be the same night or day that you are rescued, for as soon as one plot is carried out he will have his eyes opened and take care to stop the other one. So, as I say, the whole thing must be sprung at once."

"Why not get me out first, and then I can help you?"

"Everything is against that."

"How?"

"Why, you see, to begin with, we do not know the location of this place. It may not be very far from Banks's house, and it may be several miles. In the next place, he always comes with me when I come here and

locks the door on the outside. It is going to be a difficult thing to get out of here to begin with, and then when we are out the chances are that it will take us so long to get to the other place that they will have ample time to receive warning, and prepare for our reception."

"What is your plan, then?"

"The girl will have to be rescued first."

"How will you work it?"

"I haven't decided upon a plan of operations yet, but hope to develop it within a day or two, and then we will be able to arrange the other. There is another thing to be considered."

"What is that?"

"I wish to arrange to arrest Banks at the same time."

"Yes?"

"There will be one difficulty about that, too."

"What is that?"

"I have no warrant, and cannot get away to procure one without running the risk of arousing his suspicions."

"Rest easy on that score," smiled Ned. "For I have my warrant here yet, and you can use that."

"Where is it?"

Ned drew it from under his pillow. He had had it tucked in a little pouch and hung about his neck lest they might take it away from him, as they had everything else he had possessed.

Thad took the document and examined it.

"That is all right," he said at length.

"It is returnable any time within two months, so we need be in no hurry on that account. I was afraid it would be made out for too short a term and would be expired before we would have it returned."

"You see," explained Ned, "I had it made out that way on purpose, as it was impossible to tell how long it would take me to run down the game."

"It was a sensible idea."

"Well, about how soon do you imagine you will be ready to spring our plot?"

"In two or three days, I should think. If the girl keeps on improving as she has so far, three days more at the most will put her in condition to be removed."

At this juncture the sharp ears of the detective caught the unmistakable sound of some one outside of the door, and he was at it in an instant.

But quick as he was, he was none too soon, for he had barely time to remove the blanket when he heard a key in the lock.

But he managed to toss the blanket aside and be walking off in an unconcerned manner when the door opened and in walked Banks.

The two hours were no more than half up, and Thad was a little uneasy to know why the fellow had returned so soon.

However, when the door opened the "doctor" turned upon his heel to meet the intruder with as indifferent an air as if he had expected him at that very instant.

Thad could see by the man's expression, however, that something had gone wrong, for he looked worried and eyed the detective suspiciously, and then glanced in the direction of the bed.

Ned was equal to the occasion, and was, to all appearances, sound asleep.

Banks seemed disconcerted, and looked from the bed back to Thad with a surprised expression.

At this the detective coolly drew his watch and looked at it.

"The time is not yet up, Mr. Banks," he remarked in a matter-of-fact tone.

"I know it is not," replied the other in an agitated voice, "but—but—I thought I heard talking in here."

"Perhaps you did—a few minutes ago—before the patient went to sleep. However, that was half an hour ago," answered Thad in the same even tone.

"But I thought I heard talking—within a few minutes—"

Here he paused and turned a little red.

"You certainly did not, sir," rejoined the detective firmly. "But suppose you had?"

The old rascal was evidently very much embarrassed, and did not know how to answer, and Thad proceeded:

"If you desire to hear what passes between the patient and myself, sir, in the way of conversation, you had better remain here."

"Only I shall have to insist upon your stepping out while I perform my operations, for I wouldn't have you witness one of those and learn the secret for all the wealth you possess."

"Oh, it's all right, doctor," said the other apologetically. "I do not wish to interfere in your business, and I have no doubt that I was mistaken. But I was sure I heard—"

"What?" asked Thad promptly and sternly.

"Nothing."

"You were doubtless right, then. You heard nothing."

The policy man twisted and stammered, vainly struggling for an excuse for his conduct, and finally appeared to give it up, for he said:

"Well, perhaps I had better withdraw for another hour, doctor?"

"Suit yourself about that, sir," returned the detective in a polite voice. "I shall not be compelled to perform another operation this evening, and would be delighted to have you remain, if you feel so disposed. Or, so far as that goes, we may as well go now as wait another hour, as there is nothing to do but administer the medicine which the attendant can do as well as I."

"Very well, perhaps we had better go," rejoined the other, turning toward the door.

It was not until he had opened the door and called in the attendant that the detective's mind was recalled to the fact that Banks had not left the fellow in the room this time, and he had no doubt that he had been standing at the door listening to what had been said.

If he had had any doubt on this score, the guilty look of the servant when he looked at him would have confirmed his suspicion.

The fellow slunk in as if he had been stealing and could not look the detective in the face.

This circumstance worried Thad a good deal, although the boss appeared to be satisfied with his explanation.

Burr knew too well, though, that if the fellow had heard anything of the conversation that passed between the two detectives and had told his master, the latter would not forget it, no matter how much he attempted to dissemble, and would watch the two men with redoubled vigilance.

The hood was adjusted over Thad's head, and he was then led from the building.

Banks opened the carriage door and shoved the blindfolded detective in first, and then stepped forward to speak to the driver in a confidential whisper, which had the effect of increasing Thad's uneasiness, for he could not but believe that the fellow had some dark plot in store for him.

Thad was still well armed, however, and was determined to sell his life as dearly as possible, if it should come to that.

But while this was in progress he was surprised at feeling a sharp pull at his right sleeve, which was on the opposite side of the carriage from that which he had entered, and he naturally leaned forward to ascertain the cause, although he could see nothing.

As he did so a warm substance came in contact with his ear and before he had time to recover from his surprise a voice whispered:

"Do not go to sleep to-night. If you do you will never wake. I will do all I can to help you, though, and do not fear. Get Lottie out of the house to-night, if possible. She will suggest a plan. If you want to know who I am, I am the veiled woman you saw coming out of the lawyer's office three days ago."

Thad had been spell-bound by this mysterious and unexpected message, and it was not until its conclusion that he recovered sufficiently to attempt to reply or ask a question in return.

And then, as the lips that had whispered the message appeared to have been withdrawn, he put out his hand to make sure that the whisperer was still there before speaking in response, but only to find that she had vanished.

It was a sense of relief that he discovered a moment later, when Banks entered the carriage, that he had apparently known nothing of the circumstance, and a moment later the carriage rolled away.

If the policy king entertained any unpleasant recollection of the incident at the

room, he did not show it, for Thad had never seen him more cheerful or talkative. Indeed, he monopolized the time with his conversation so completely that the detective had no opportunity of putting in a word, if he had wanted to ever so much.

But Thad was in no humor to talk.

His mind was too full of plans and speculations of the future.

In the first place, he was worried over the incident of the room; which he argued would result in nothing good for him or the two victims of the villainous policy man.

Then the warning of the mysterious woman.

If there was anything in it, it indicated that his identity and scheme had been discovered, and the boss only awaited an opportunity to wreak summary vengeance on him, as he did on all traitors.

But could he put any faith in this?

In spite of his attempted doubts, he could not persuade himself that there was not something in it.

But who was the woman? he asked himself.

At first he pitched upon Stella as the probable one capable of doing such a thing, but then he remembered how closely she was espied by her father and step-mother, and abandoned the notion.

Then came the admonition to remove Lottie that very night.

This seemed impossible, for his plans were not sufficiently matured, even if the girl were well enough to travel, which he doubted.

Again, if he did succeed in removing the girl to a place of safety, that would destroy all chances of saving Ned, because, even if he should be able to find his way to the place where he was confined, Banks would take the precaution to either have him removed or so strongly guarded, that there would be no chance of getting at him.

At length they got back to Banks's residence, and Thad was unblindfolded and allowed to return to the sick chamber.

As soon as he entered the room he saw that the girl was greatly excited over something.

And as soon as they were alone she whispered excitedly:

"It is all up with us, I'm afraid!"

"How is that?" he asked breathlessly.

"He has discovered who you are, and knows all about our plot!"

"How do you know?"

"Estelle told me just a little while ago."

"How long ago?"

"Oh, perhaps half an hour ago."

"How did he find it out?"

"I do not know."

"He must have discovered it since we left here?"

"He did, I think."

"Then it must have been from one of the servants over at the other place."

"Possibly."

"But how did he find it out? Did Estelle know?"

"She did not say. She only said that we had been found out, and that we must both get away from here to-night."

"But you are not able to travel."

"Oh, yes, I am. I am strong, and the desperate nature of the case will lend me additional vigor."

"Still, if they know our plans they will be on the lookout for something of this kind, and it will be impossible to get you out without being discovered."

"Yes, I think we can work it," she insisted eagerly. "They do not imagine I am strong enough to travel, and that will be one point in our favor, for they will not expect us to attempt the thing so soon. Besides, Stella has a plan which I think will work all right."

"What is it?"

"She proposes to come in here some time between midnight and morning, let me dress up in her clothes and she will take my place in bed. Her maid, who is into the plot, will watch and see that the hallways are clear, and when the proper time comes, I will slip out and go down-stairs, where the footman, who is also in Stella's confidence, will let me out. The footman will then hurry up here and exchange clothes with you, and you can get on without exciting suspicion."

"The plan is a good one, and I believe

will succeed if every one performs his part well."

"I believe so," replied the girl confidently.

"There is but one thing against it."

"And that is?"

"That Stella does not come up sooner. We could do this thing now better than later."

CHAPTER XVII.

A BOLD STRIKE.

IN spite of Thad's habitual coolness, he could not avert a certain nervousness.

The next two or three hours dragged as he had never known hours to drag before.

Aware of the plot against him, he wondered that Banks did not act at once, and fully expected every moment for him to put in an appearance with a dozen or more armed ruffians at his back, and take him prisoner.

Of course he had no notion of being taken alive, but the anticipation of his probable coming filled him with a certain indescribable dread.

Again, the fact of his not coming proved him to be a coward, and Thad dreaded a coward more than he did a brave man, for he would be more likely to take a sneaking advantage.

Thus the hours dragged on, and midnight came and passed.

The house had grown still, and to all appearances the household were slumbering.

Still time wore on, and still Stella did not appear.

One, two, three o'clock came and passed, and Thad began to despair of her coming.

But he consoled himself in the thought that Banks did not intend to do anything that night either.

"She does not intend to come," he murmured to Lottie.

"Yes, she will," was the hopeful response. "Stella promised, and she always keeps her promise."

"Except when she breaks it," interposed the detective.

"Except when she breaks it? What do you mean?"

"I mean," he retorted rather gruffly, "that she does not always keep her word."

"Stella?"

"Yes. Don't you remember yesterday she promised to come up to see you, and she did not come?"

"Yes, but she had a good reason for that."

"What was her reason?"

"Her step-mother came back just as she was getting ready to come up, and of course that put an end to it."

"She may have a similar reason this time."

"No, I don't believe she has any excuse this time, for her step-mother will be in bed long before this time."

"At all events, she does not come."

"But she will. Only have patience."

"But morning will soon be here, and then it will be too late to do anything. I don't believe she intends to—"

But at that moment there was a tap at the door, so gentle, that ears less acute than those of the detective would not have heard it.

Lottie started up in bed and flushed with fresh excitement.

Burr opened the door cautiously, doubtfully.

A slender figure, clad in a clinging sort of wrap, glided in as noiselessly as if it had been a shadow.

"Stella!" exclaimed Lottie. "I knew you would come! He didn't believe—"

"Sh-s-s-sh!" admonished Stella, clapping her hand over the excited girl's mouth. "You mustn't speak so loud, dear, or everything will be lost."

Then followed a silence for a moment or two, during which the detective and Stella exchanged stares.

"Well, are you ready?" he finally ventured.

"Yes," she replied. "Please turn your back."

Thad took the hint and turned his face to the wall.

For a minute or two there was a bustling noise, mingled with a continuous stream of talk in an undertone.

Finally Stella said:

"All ready."

"The detective looked around and was surprised at the transformation.

Stella was in bed covered to the eyes in the sheets, and Lottie was standing there robed as Stella had been on entering.

And just then there was another rap at the door, and everybody turned pale.

Thad prepared for the worst by drawing his revolver, and then opened the door.

To his surprise and relief, it was John, the footman.

Instantly Thad formulated a new plan.

"What is it, John?" asked Stella.

"Are you ready?" he inquired in little more than a whisper.

Without speaking, Burr grasped him and drew him inside.

Closing the door the detective commanded: "Take off your coat, John, and put on mine."

"But I have to let the young lady out," objected the footman.

"Never mind about that," returned Thad, sternly. "Do as I tell you, and ask no questions. However, come to think of it, I guess you needn't put on my coat, but let me have yours, and be quick about it."

John, with a mystified look, took off his coat, and Thad was into it in an instant.

Then he did something which caused all present to stare.

He removed his gray beard and equally gray wig, leaving a smooth, youthful face, which, in a dimly lighted hall might be mistaken for that of the footman.

Then slipping a slouch hat, which he always carried for an emergency, under his coat, he took the sick girl by the arm and led her from the room.

At the top of the stairs stood Stella's maid, in a position to survey the two halls, upstairs and down, and when she saw the couple emerge from the room she beckoned them to come on, signifying that all was right.

They lost no time in making the first stairway, meanwhile the maid descending to the top of the second flight to reconnoiter, and when they reached the bottom of the first stairs, she beckoned them again.

Again they tripped noiselessly along the softly carpeted hall and descended the second stairs.

"Now," mused Thad, "one more, and we are safe!"

Another noiseless scamper along a hall, and down another flight of stairs, and the bottom hall was reached.

Thad drew a long breath.

There were but a few steps now between them and liberty, and they would soon be made.

A minute later they were at the door.

But quietly as they had proceeded, they had not been so quiet but that they aroused the boss, and just as they reached the front door he put his head over the railing, and seeing, as he supposed, his daughter and the footman arm-in-arm, he was dumfounded, to say the least.

He apparently did not suspect the true state of affairs, but imagined that his daughter, whom he had never allowed to have a lover, was eloping with the footman.

It was the most fortunate thing in the world for Thad's scheme that he made this mistake, for Banks never thought of looking into the sick-chamber to see how matters stood there, but first yelled out at the supposed footman to know what he was about, and as the latter showed no indications of either answering or stopping, he started down-stairs on the jump.

But before he had reached the bottom, or near it, Thad and his companion were in the street.

Burr did not understand how it was, but there was a carriage standing there, and without asking any questions, he opened the door and put the girl inside, and then climbed in himself.

The driver appeared to understand his business, for the instant the passengers were inside he put the whip to the horses and drove away at a rapid gait.

Thad did not know where he was going, nor did he care for the time being. His only thought was to get away, and as far away as possible, and as quickly as horseflesh could carry him.

He saw that they were going toward the lower end of the city, and so long as he knew where he was, he did not care.

The carriage had kept on West End avenue until it reached Seventieth street and there turned over to Columbus avenue. It then kept on down that street till it reached Fifty-seventh street, and there halted.

Burr was about to ask why they had stopped there, when Lottie spoke up and explained:

"I'm to get out here and go into this house, where I have some friends, and you are to wait in the carriage here for somebody."

"Who is it?" he asked curiously.

"That is not for me to say," she laughed.

"But it is somebody who is to help you."

Thad asked no more questions, but assisted the girl to alight and then helped her into the house, which he found to be an immense apartment house.

Her friends were there to meet her and took her in charge, while the detective returned to the carriage, after the girl had shaken hands with him, blessed him over and over for delivering her from death, and making him promise to call as soon as he possibly could.

Taking a seat in the carriage, he waited a long time, and day had broken, and still nobody came.

It was a dull, cloudy morning, the air full of mist and threatening to rain every minute.

Who could the person be? he wondered, and what could he want?

As he sat there thinking, his mind reverted to poor Ned, and he wondered whether he would ever be able to find the poor fellow.

Finally, and he had just about given up all hope of the person coming, there was a movement at one of the doors, and presently it was snatched open, and to his surprise, the identical veiled woman he had seen coming out of the lawyer's office stood there.

She did not stand upon ceremony, either.

Without as much as saying "by your leave," she climbed into the carriage and closed the door.

Again the driver appeared to have his instructions, for, although not a word had been spoken to him, he wheeled about and drove up-town for a couple of blocks, and then turned toward Broadway.

All this time the woman had said not a word, and as for Thad, he was speechless.

Finally she said:

"Do you remember who I am?"

"Well, it would be pretty hard to tell who you are," returned the detective, "inasmuch as I have never seen your face, but I presume you are the person who whispered to me in the dark last night, giving me the friendly warning."

"Yes, I am the same," she replied, "and I am glad you followed my advice, for you have made a good night's work of it."

"Yes, pretty good, but not one-half as much as I wanted to accomplish."

"Perhaps you want to accomplish too much?"

"No, I am not unreasonable, but there was another person whom I was quite as anxious to rescue as I was the girl."

"It may not be too late yet."

"I fear it is."

"There is nothing like hope, you know."

"That is true. But the thing should have been done last night. Now that Banks knows who I am and has discovered what I have done, he will doubtless take steps to prevent me from rescuing the young man."

"The young man?"

"Pardon me. I had forgotten that you did not know who the other party is whom I wish to rescue."

She made no response to this, and was silent for some moments.

Meanwhile the carriage rolled on through the murky streets, which was so laden by fog that you could not see across the street.

Finally Thad remarked:

"It is probably none of my business, but I would like to know where we are going now."

The mysterious woman laughed a dry, cackling sort of laugh.

"Would you really like to know?" she said.

"I certainly would."

"Well, if you will wait a little while you shall know."

"Why cannot I know now?"

"Because I prefer not to tell you yet."

"Then suppose I choose not to go?" he said crustily.

Again she laughed.

"Suit yourself about that," she said.

"But you are not afraid of me, after what I have already done for you?"

Thad reflected a moment, and then he saw that he had no right to be too inquisitive with this mysterious person, as she had probably saved his life that very night.

"No, I am not afraid of you," he rejoined, "and what is more, I have no right to ask the question, as I know you would tell me if it was at all to my interest to know."

"I certainly would, especially after the brave piece of work you have done to-night."

By this time the carriage had passed Broadway and was still going toward the East Side of the city.

Near First avenue the carriage stopped and the woman pushed open the door and got out without waiting for the detective to assist her, and merely beckoning him to follow, entered the door of a tenement-house before which they had stopped.

Thad climbed out and followed, wondering where the mysterious woman was taking him.

She paused when she got inside the vestibule, the door of which stood open, and the hall within was still so dark that it would have been impossible to have recognized any one in it.

When the detective came up with her she whispered:

"We must be very cautious and not make any noise on going in here. We have selected a good time, I imagine, as in all probability everybody will be asleep, but everything depends upon our getting in without disturbing anybody."

"I understand," answered the detective, still wondering where he was about to enter.

They climbed two flights of narrow, gloomy stairs, and finally the woman stopped before a door.

She put her ear to the keyhole and listened, and then turning to the detective, whispered:

"I guess we are all right. There is no sound within."

With that she took a key from her pocket and put it into the lock and presently opened the door.

As soon as Thad stepped inside he knew where he was.

He thought he might be mistaken, but when he looked toward a bed which stood at one side of the room and saw Ned lying there, he knew that he was not mistaken.

The boy was asleep, but the woman went to the bedside and shook him up.

"Wake up, old fellow!" she said. "Here's somebody to see you."

But just as he opened his eyes, the woman seemed to suddenly remember something, and running up to the detective, said:

"The attendant is in the back room there asleep, you had better take care of him."

Thad saturated his handkerchief with chloroform and went into the other room, and soon had the sleeping attendant beyond all power of disturbance.

But when he returned to the front room Burr was astonished to see that the mysterious woman, having divested herself of her dress, was none other than Herbert Crosby, Banks's nephew.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED CALL.

To say that the detective was surprised to find that the mysterious woman, as he had supposed her to be, was a man, and that the nephew of the very man he was trying to capture, is to put it mildly.

He had speculated much upon her probable identity, and had about settled down upon the theory that she was no other than Stella Banks, and now to discover that it was not a woman at all, but a young man, astonished him greatly.

The meeting between the two was

tremely cordial, as they had not seen each other since the night Ned had gone to serve the warrant upon Edward Banks.

"I'm sure I never expected to see you alive again, Ned," cried Herbert. "As soon as I heard that you intended to go there alone and try to serve the papers on the boss, I said to myself, 'Ned's done for this trip, and no mistake.'"

"And so I should have been if it had not been for this brave man, Mr. Burr," rejoined Ned, huskily.

"And I want to tell you that no better or braver man ever lived," interposed Herbert.

"Now, boys," interjected Thad, "we have no time to talk. We want to get out of here, before it is too late. We can do our talking at some other time. Ned, do you feel able to travel?"

"Oh, yes, I am all right. I'll be with you in a moment."

With that he rose, and although he staggered about a good deal on account of his weakness, proceeded to dress himself, in which Herbert assisted him.

Meanwhile Thad could not refrain from satisfying his curiosity on a certain point.

"Herbert," he said, "how did you manage to find this place?"

The young man laughed.

"There was something funny about that," he responded. "You see, the night Ned went to arrest the old man he wouldn't hear to my going with him, as he wanted all the credit himself—"

"No, that was not the reason, Herbert," protested Ned. "Being a nephew of the old man, and not on very good terms with him, I was afraid you might queer the game."

"Well, whatever the cause, Ned wouldn't let me go with him, but I was determined to keep a watch on him, as well as possible, for I knew he was going to put his foot in it. So I followed him to the house on West End avenue."

"You didn't go in?" interrupted Thad.

"No, sir. I just followed till I saw him enter the house, and then took up my station across the road and kept watch of the door to see whether he would come out or not."

"After a long time he did come out, but he was accompanied by the old man. There was a carriage waiting for them, and I knew something was up. The old man never provides a carriage for a victim unless he has something strong in store for him."

"Well, they got into the carriage and started off toward the upper end of the city at a race-track gait. I tried to follow them, but they were too much for me. I couldn't keep in sight of the carriage, had to give it up."

"Well?" interrogated the detective, as he paused.

"I spent the next two weeks in searching the different places I knew the old man to have, and watching the house at night."

"Finally I became about discouraged and concluded to call upon you and ask your advice or assistance. It was along in the evening, and just as I reached your house I saw an old fellow coming out. I concluded at once that it was you, but wasn't certain. Anyway, I decided to follow you and see where you went, thinking you might know where Ned was, and were on your way to see him."

"But to my surprise, you went to the old man's house in West End avenue."

"You managed to keep up that time, eh?" said Thad.

"Yes, for when I saw you get into a coupe, I hired a cab, and in that way had no trouble in keeping up with you."

"When I saw you go to the old man's place I no longer had any doubt about it being you, so I watched for you to come out as I had done in Ned's case; but you didn't come out. I watched there nearly all night, and still you didn't come out."

"What did you think?"

"That the old man had either done for you on the spot, or that I had been mistaken about it being you. Anyway, the next night I watched again, but with the same result. I felt sure then that you had been done for, nevertheless, the next night I watched again, and that time I was more successful. About eight o'clock you came out, accompanied by the boss, and I said to

myself 'now he's in for it,' determined to follow you."

"Did you still have a cab?"

"No, but I struck another scheme this time."

"How was that?"

"I jumped on behind the carriage, and rode all the way in that manner, only jumping off when the rig turned to the curb at its destination. I saw the old man lead you out blindfolded, and I was sure your time had come, and wondered how you had allowed yourself to be taken in so cheaply."

"Well, you had only been inside a little while when the old man came out alone, and I was surer than ever that he had done for you. But as he did not enter the carriage on coming out, but walked away leisurely like a man that has a little time to kill, I concluded to stay there and watch."

"Well, I staid there for over half an hour and, as the old man did not come back, I concluded to go up in the building and see if I could find where you had gone."

"I wandered about in the dark halls for some time—over an hour, I should say—and at last heard somebody coming up the steps, and knew by the walk that it was the old man; so I crouched into a corner till he passed, and then followed him up here. When he entered the room and closed the door, I put my ear to the key-hole and listened."

"Could you hear what passed?" inquired the detective anxiously.

"Plainly."

"Indeed?"

Thad was wondering at that moment whether Banks had not overheard some of the conversation which passed between himself and Ned.

"Yes, I could hear every word, and that is how I discovered not only that you were here, but that Ned was also. While I was trying to make up my mind what to do, I heard some one about to open the door, and I had just time enough to dodge into a dark corner before you and the old man came out."

"You may believe I was puzzled to understand what it all meant. I heard you talking about curing Ned, and all that sort of thing, but what puzzled me most was how you came to return with Banks, and apparently of your own free will."

"Did you follow us again?" interposed Thad.

"Yes," replied Herbert, "as soon as you entered the carriage again I jumped up behind and rode all the way back to the house. Then I began to see through the plot a little. The fact that they drove you about the city for half an hour instead of going straight to the house, convinced me that you were being deceived in some way, and then it occurred to me that maybe you were working some scheme, playing doctor, or something of that sort."

"You also followed us last night, did you not?" questioned the detective.

"Yes. Or rather, I came here and watched for you."

"You were in disguise this time?"

"Yes. I was afraid of being detected, so I put on the woman's rig you saw just now. Well, as soon as the old man came out I went up to the door again, but, to my astonishment, the attendant was standing there with his ear against the key-hole. I knew it was all up with your plot then, if that fellow heard as much as I had the night before, for I knew he would tell the old man as soon as he returned, if indeed he did not go off and look him up on purpose to tell him what he had heard."

"So I hurried away, took a cab and drove to the old man's house. As luck would have it, I succeeded in seeing Stella, and told her the whole story, including the plot to poison Lottie."

"What did she say?" asked Ned, who had remained silent up to this time.

"Say? She was astonished—dumfounded. Indeed, she did not believe a word of it at first, but after she had gone up and had a talk with Lottie, she became convinced."

"And promised her assistance?" asked Thad.

"Yes, she proposed the scheme of taking Lottie's place in bed, and letting Lottie put on her clothes, in order to make her escape. I then took the cab and drove back here, and

arrived just in time, for you were just leaving."

"How did you manage to escape the detection of the old man?"

"Oh, that was easy enough. It was very dark, and I took the additional precaution of keeping in the shadow until he put you into the carriage, and then, while he was telling the driver something I slipped round to the opposite side of the carriage and whispered my warning."

"A most excellent piece of work all round," declared the older detective, "and I must say that you would make a splendid detective, with a little training and practice."

"That is what I think," interjected Ned. "A most excellent one, and I have advised him to go into the business."

"I might, if I could have you as instructor," returned Herbert, modestly.

"I shall take great delight in taking you as a pupil," answered Thad.

"Then it is a bargain," cried Herbert, enthusiastically.

"It is," rejoined Thad. "But are we all ready?"

"All ready," replied Ned.

"Then let us move. We may be too late if we delay any longer."

"How about the other part of our scheme?" ventured Ned.

"What is that?"

"The arrest of Banks."

"We will have to postpone that for some other occasion, I'm afraid."

"Will we not have all our work to do over again?" persisted the young detective. "You see, as soon as he discovers that we have succeeded in our plot he will make himself scarce, and there is no telling where or when we will be able to run him down again."

"That is true. But what do you propose?"

"That we remain here and wait for him."

"But he may not come."

"I believe he will. As soon as he discovers that Lottie is gone, he will come over to see whether we have succeeded in my case. It is still early in the morning, and he will be in no hurry about getting up, as he is a late sleeper, but when he does get up, depend upon it, there will be a scene."

"I pity poor Stella," interposed Herbert.

"Yes, poor girl! she will doubtless suffer for the part she has played in the matter," said Ned.

Burr thought the matter over carefully, and finally said:

"I don't know but your plan is a good one, Ned, and we will wait. In the mean time, however, it will be as well to notify the Police Headquarters and have them send us up a detail of police. There is no telling but this man may bring a crowd of his ruffians with him."

"Very well," said Herbert. "I will go and telephone Headquarters for the detail, and you can stay here with Ned."

"All right," answered Thad. "But be as prompt as possible, as time is precious."

"I sha'n't be a minute, for I know where there is a telephone only a few doors from here."

Accordingly the young man departed, and Thad and Ned waited for his return.

Thad took occasion to look into the other room to see how the attendant whom he had chloroformed was getting on, and it was lucky he did, for the fellow was just coming out of his stupor. Thad prevented his recovery, however, by administering another dose of the lulling drug.

Meanwhile Ned had reclined on the bed to rest from the exertion the dressing had cost him, and Thad, seating himself at his side, resumed the conversation.

"That is a clever boy," he began.

"Very," assented Ned.

"The work he has done in the last few days shows him to have a good head."

"He is remarkably cool and cautious, besides being as keen as they make them."

"But there is one thing that puzzles me."

"What is that?"

"Where he got a key to this room."

"There is some mystery about that."

"I wonder if Stella could have given it to him?" suggested the detective.

"I hardly think so, for I do not see where she could have got it."

"She knows very little about her father's business, then?"

"Absolutely nothing. She certainly would not be in possession of the key to one of his dens, at any rate."

"We must ask him when he comes back," said Thad, "for I am very curious about it."

Thus time wore on, and the two detectives began to wonder why Herbert did not return.

An hour went by, and still he did not put in an appearance.

Thad grew uneasy.

"I wonder what has happened him?" he finally murmured. "He said he knew where there was a telephone only a short distance away."

"Perhaps it was not in a condition to be used, or perhaps owing to the earliness of the hour, the place wasn't open when he got there, and he has had some difficulty in finding another one."

"Oh, as to that," muttered Thad impatiently, "he has had time to go to Police Headquarters and notify them verbally."

"Perhaps that is what he has done."

"I cannot imagine why he should have done that, when I warned him of the importance of getting back early."

"It may have been," suggested Ned, determined to find a plausible excuse for his friend, "that, being unable to find a telephone, he had no other alternative."

"Nonsense!" cried Thad, impatiently. "Do you mean to tell me that he could not find a telephone, or a dozen of them, this side of Headquarters?"

"Perhaps—"

But here he was interrupted by a sound at the door.

"Ah, here he comes now!" exclaimed Ned excitedly.

Thad got up and moved toward the door, forgetting whether he had locked it after Herbert took his departure or not.

But before he reached it he was made satisfied that he had not, for there was a key thrust into the lock, and, after being twisted about without success for a time, owing to the fact that a key was in the lock on the inside, the door was opened.

But it was not Herbert whom the detective met.

It was Edward Banks!

Nor was this the worst of it.

At his back were no less than a dozen of as rough-looking villains as he had ever set eyes upon.

CHAPTER XIX.

STRATAGEM AGAINST FORCE.

THAD was no more surprised than Banks appeared to be.

It was evident, notwithstanding his preparation, that he had not expected to find the detective there.

This, at least, was what Thad thought, judging from the actions of the man when he opened the door and saw the detective standing before him. But his subsequent actions showed Burr that there was something more serious than that.

What it was he could not imagine.

But the fellow, after a second look at the detective, turned deadly pale, dropped the revolver which he had clutched in his hand, and began to tremble violently.

Thad was astonished.

He was also interested, but could make nothing out of it.

It did not occur to him at that instant to serve the fellow with the warrant which he had in his pocket, for he could think of nothing but the man's appearance and condition.

Banks stood for a full minute thus, staring at the detective as though his eyes would burst out of his head.

Then, to Burr's great surprise—for he knew Banks to be no coward—he turned to those who brought up the rear, and said:

"Save yourselves, boys! It's all up with us!"

"What's the matter?" growled one of the ruffians, who did not like the idea, evidently, of giving up the fight so easily. "Dere's only two on 'em, an' one's sick."

"But, don't you see who it is?" gasped the trembling man.

"Nope, I don't see nothin' 'bout him particular," growled the ruffian.

"It is he!"

"Who?"

"The detective!" whined the policy king.

"Wal, w'ot o' that?"

"You can't fight a dead man!"

"Er dead man? W'ot d'yer mean?"

"Don't you recognize him? He's the same man we put in the cistern, and consequently it must be his ghost!" shrieked the policy man, whose teeth had begun to chatter.

"W'ot!" shrieked the ruffian opening his eyes very wide and also growing ghastly white.

"It's the ghost of the man we put in the cistern!" repeated Banks.

"That's so!" gasped the other, just recognizing the detective, whom he had put into the cistern and whom he naturally supposed to be dead.

By this time several others of the gang had craned their necks over the shoulders of the two and got a glimpse of the so-called ghost, and they too became frightened.

In another instant there was a general panic.

Those nearest the stairs broke and ran, and the others followed in quick order.

Then it was that Thad realized that he was letting a splendid opportunity escape him.

There would never be a better chance of arresting the policy king than now when he was panic-stricken.

Throwing the door wide open, therefore, he dashed after the retreating figure with the rapidity of lightning.

Banks did not notice that he was being followed until he was halfway down the first flight of stairs, and the detective was upon him.

When he discovered this fact Banks struggled desperately to get past those in front of him who choked the passage.

But this was impossible.

They had the passageway completely blocked so that it was impossible to pass.

Thad saw his advantage and congratulated himself.

Making a quick spring, he clutched the fleeing man by the collar and brought him up with a sharp halt.

For an instant Banks appeared to be paralyzed with terror.

He was as an infant in the powerful grasp of the detective.

Thad held him with one hand, and with the other felt in his pocket for the handcuffs he thought he had there.

But just then he made a discovery.

He had no handcuffs in his pocket.

And for good reason.

He had on the footman's coat!

What was to be done?

He turned and looked back. Seeing Ned close at hand, he called to him to bring him a rope.

The sound of the detective's voice appeared to have a magical effect on the prisoner.

He seemed suddenly to realize his situation, and possibly to doubt the theory that Thad was a ghost.

He cast a hasty glance ahead of him, and saw that his backers had nearly cleared the first flight of stairs.

This gave him room for flight, but at the same time it weakened his chances of assistance in case of an encounter.

However, he turned upon the detective, who was wholly unprepared for resistance, and began to struggle with the strength of desperation.

Banks was a powerful man, and added to his natural strength, was that superhuman power that comes to one in a situation of life and death.

Thad struggled with him with all the strength he possessed, and tried in vain to reach his revolver.

But this was impossible, as he was compelled to use both hands in order to hold his prisoner.

Meanwhile the latter was gaining on him.

And then he suddenly resorted to a bit of stratagem which threw the balance of victory on his side.

Thad was on the upper side, of course, and the other was to some extent under him.

Taking advantage of this fact, Banks suddenly ducked his head, pulled the detective

over him and succeeded in throwing him over his head.

Burr managed to retain his grasp on the fellow's collar, and his weight in falling pulled the other man down, and the two fell in a heap to the bottom of the stairs.

Both men were on their feet about the same time and stood glaring at each other.

Banks had become satisfied by this time that it was no ghost he had to deal with, and his fear had consequently vanished.

It was evident to both men that neither had the advantage so far as strength was concerned, and each was well-armed.

For a full minute they stood thus, neither speaking and each watching for the other to open hostilities.

Finally Thad said:

"Come, you may as well surrender now as later. It is only a matter of time when you will have to anyway."

"Surrender?" cried the other indignantly. "Never!"

With that he attempted to draw his revolver, but quicker than lightning Burr grasped the wrist of the hand with which he was about to draw the weapon, at the same time drawing his own revolver and leveling it at the other's head.

But the policy man was not to be caught napping, for he instantly drew his revolver with his disengaged hand, and the next second had it pointed at the detective.

Thus they were upon equal footing once more.

Thad was exasperated.

He was anxious to bring matters to a crisis, but this was a difficult thing to do under the circumstances without jeopardizing his own life.

For another minute the two men stood eying each other, each watching for the least advantage.

At length Thad hit upon a plan.

He still clutched the other's right wrist.

This gave him a little advantage over his adversary, for he held his weapon in his right hand while Banks held his in his left.

Watching his chance the detective gave a sudden twist of the other's wrist which turned him half-round.

The movement was so sudden and unexpected that it took the other completely by surprise, and before he had regained his presence of mind Thad administered a stinging blow upon his left arm, knocking the pistol out of his left hand, which fell several feet away.

Banks was completely unarmed now, as he had dropped his other pistol at the door of the room on seeing what he took to be the detective's ghost.

The policy man was now completely at Thad's mercy and realized the fact.

But he was as much determined as ever not to surrender.

"Throw up your hands!" yelled the detective. "Throw up your hands, Edward Banks, or you are a dead man!"

The fellow merely ground his teeth, folded his arms and looked defiantly at Burr.

Thad was in a quandary what to do.

He did not want to shoot his man down, and yet there appeared no possibility of making him move from his position.

Thad glanced back and saw Ned standing close behind him.

"Go telephone for a patrol wagon, Ned," he commanded.

Ned started to obey the order, but just as he was passing Banks, the latter suddenly turned and dealt him a blow that, in his weak condition, knocked him down.

This infuriated Thad, and before the fellow was aware of his purpose, he dealt him a blow that sent him sprawling on the floor.

And then before he could regain his feet, Thad was on the top of him and had him by the throat.

"Now will you yield?" growled Thad, closing his fingers on the fellow's windpipe.

Banks showed no indication of yielding, and the detective again called to Ned, who by this time had regained his feet:

"Hurry up, Ned, and call for a patrol!"

Ned hastened away to execute the command, and for a time matters remained at a standstill.

Banks lay calmly there under the detective's weight, making no effort to release himself.

Several minutes went by thus, and finally Ned returned to say that he had sent in a call.

Fifteen minutes went by, and Thad thought the patrol ought to soon arrive. And then, just as he began to expect it every instant, there was the sound of shuffling feet on the stairs, and Ned called out:

"Look out, Mr. Burr, here they come!"

Thad glanced toward the stairs where the noise came from, and saw to his horror that the crowd of toughs were piling up the stairs as fast as they could come.

He realized that it was all up with him, unless the police soon arrived.

However, he knew that instantaneous action was essential just then, and jumped to his feet, thus releasing his prisoner.

Rushing to the top of the stairs just in time to prevent the leader of the gang from reaching it, Thad leveled two revolvers upon them, and shouted:

"Halt! The first man that puts his head up here will receive a ball through it!"

They saw that he had the drop on them, that a single shot from his pistol would send death and destruction among them, and they paused.

But the next moment the voice of the boss was heard.

"Why do you stop, cowards? Charge on up!"

Burr had for the moment forgotten his prisoner, but at the sound of his voice he turned to see what he was about.

And he was surprised at the sight that met his gaze.

Ned had picked up the boss's pistol from the floor and had him covered with it.

When Thad met the young man's eye he winked significantly.

"He's all right," observed Ned, smiling.

"He can talk, but that is all the harm he can do. You take care of the crowd and I'll look after him."

Banks was scowling at the boy, and looked as if he would enjoy eating him. At the same time it was evident that he was afraid to move lest the young detective should pull the trigger.

"You don't love me as much as you did a couple of weeks ago, do you, Eddie?" laughed Ned. "And you don't imagine that I am quite as badly stuck on you? That was a nice piece of hypnotism you put upon me, but why don't you do it now? Now would be a splendid time for you to exercise your power."

The policy man made no response, but scowled darkly. Ned went on with his ridiculing.

"You thought you would get rid of me by feeding me on poison, didn't you, as well as the girl? That was a noble act of yours, trying to poison a poor defenseless girl, wasn't it? That illustrated the nobility of character you used to boast of. But you made the mistake of putting too much confidence in the doctor, there. I could have told you that he wouldn't do to trust—as a doctor."

At this allusion Banks glanced at Thad with a puzzled expression.

He appeared about to say something, but restrained himself and remained silent.

Ned guessed the meaning of his consternation, and replied:

"Yes, you needn't worry over it. That is the doctor. Changed in appearance a little, hasn't he? Still, it's the same man that you put in the cistern and thought you had done for, and the same that afterward turned up as the gray-beard doctor, who was going to help you out of your difficulties. And he did, too. He will save you from the electric chair, to which you would have gone if you had succeeded in killing us. But as it is, you will only have to spend a few years in the Pen."

While this scene was going on Thad had kept the crowd of ruffians at bay.

Seeing at last that there was no possibility of their coming up in the face of those two murderous looking revolvers, the crowd began to waver, and there were unmistakable indications of their desire to run away.

Finally they did begin to slink away, one at a time toward the entrance of the building, and would doubtless have soon made their escape, but just as the first one reached the street door they were met by the detail of police.

The appearance of the police had a strange effect.

The crowd of ruffians, who had quailed before the detective's pistols, now surged back up the stairs, passed Thad with his threatening weapons as if he had been a harmless statue, and bounded on upward.

The movement was so sudden that it took Thad by surprise, and he did not even discharge his revolvers, which, of course, would have had no effect then. And by the time he realized the meaning of the mad dash of terrified ruffians, they had swept up-stairs, carrying not only the policy king, but also Ned, with them.

Thad hastened up after them, but by the time he reached the top of the stairs they were safely inside of the rooms the detective had just left a few minutes before.

CHAPTER XX.

HERBERT'S LITTLE PLOT.

WHEN he found the door shut in his face, the detective turned, instinctively, and glanced behind him at the squad of policemen who had followed him up.

The sergeant in command nodded to the great detective, and then asked:

"What's to be done, Mr. Burr, batter the door down?"

"That appears to be our only alternative," replied Thad. "But we want to be cautious about the use of fire-arms, as one of the boys is in there with them."

"Who is that?"

"Ned."

"All right; we sha'n't use our guns except as a last resort."

The sergeant then turned to his men and instructed them not to shoot except in self-defense, and then turned to the door with a view to seeing how it could best be broken open. But the next instant he looked at Thad with an expression of surprise.

"Why, there's a key in the door!" he exclaimed.

"So there is!" ejaculated the detective, quite as much surprised as the police officer. "I wonder how it got there?"

"Those fellows were too badly rattled to think of taking it out, I suppose."

"I remember now," replied Burr. "When that fellow came up some time ago he put the key into the lock, not knowing that the door was not locked, and when he discovered me in the room he was so badly scared that he forgot to take the key out or anything else."

"Well, that simplifies matters," rejoined the policeman. "All we have to do is to open the door and walk in."

"That may not be a judicious thing to do."

"Why?"

"It stands to reason that they will be expecting us and will be prepared accordingly. You know the advantages a person in a room has over the person forcing his way in?"

"Yes; but in my opinion those ducks are too badly rattled to do much fighting, for if they had not lost their heads they would have thought about removing the key."

"There may be something in that. At the same time, they may have recovered somewhat after entering the room."

"Nevertheless, I am not afraid to open the door, and shall do it," declared the sergeant, who was a dare-devil sort of fellow.

With that he stepped forward and took hold of the knob.

"I tell you again," protested the detective, "that you are doing a hazardous thing!"

The sergeant only shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

The next instant he threw the door wide open.

Contrary to Thad's prediction and expectation, no shot was fired, nor was there any other manifestation of resistance.

Burr was astonished, and peered into the room to ascertain what was the cause of this want of spirit on the part of the ruffians.

But he was more astonished than ever to see that there was not a man in sight.

He thought very little of this, however, as he supposed they had crowded into the little back room behind the curtain.

He did not stop to consider that it would have been next to impossible for that number of men to get into the space.

Emboldened by the fact that they had made no resistance at the outset, Thad strode deliberately back and pulled away the curtain.

The police crowded into the room ready to back him in case of a fight.

But to the detective's utter amazement, the room was as empty as he had found the first one.

He turned and stared blankly at the sergeant, who was immediately behind him.

The sergeant looked inquiringly at him.

"What does it mean?" he gasped.

"Ask me an easy one," replied Thad.

"They seem to have vanished into air."

"They have some outlet somewhere," suggested the sergeant.

"Undoubtedly," returned Thad.

And then followed the search for the outlet.

They were not long in finding it.

A narrow door in a dark corner of the bedroom and covered with a *portiere*, stood open.

"This is where they made their escape," observed Thad.

"That is clear enough," growled the policeman, "but the trouble is, where does it lead to?"

"Some secret passage, no doubt, and through it to the street."

"And by the time we grope our way through this secret passage, our game will have escaped," growled the policeman.

"There is little doubt of that," assented Burr. "But what else is there to be done?"

"If we could only discover where the passage comes out, and head them off—"

"Yes, that would be excellent. But our game will have plenty of time to escape before we succeed in discovering the outlet, I fancy," rejoined Burr.

"Well, shall we try the passage?" asked the policeman, who was evidently not very well pleased with the prospect of such an adventure.

"That is the only course I see," answered Thad. "However, you need not go. One or two of your men to accompany me is all that I ask."

"Oh, we may as well all go," retorted the sergeant. "We shall at least have the satisfaction of finding where the passage leads to, if nothing more."

So saying he pushed forward, and the detective seeing his intention took the lead.

But just as he was entering the door he was startled by a confused hum of voices away off somewhere in the distance and stopped to listen.

The voices emanated from somewhere below and appeared to be approaching.

The sergeant, who had also heard the noise, looked at Thad inquiringly.

"They appear to be coming back," said the detective.

"Impossible!" growled the other, thrusting his head in at the door and listening. "By Jove! I believe they are," he finally admitted. "I wonder what it means?"

"They have evidently met with an impediment somewhere. It can't be that Herbert—"

"That's it!" cried that young man, bursting into the room at that instant. "Herbert did it with his little ax."

"What do you mean?" inquired both men in a breath.

"You'll see in a minute," answered Herbert. "I didn't think it worth while to have the cops come in the front way as I knew the gang would make a break for the rear exit if they ever got into the building, so I had the police go in the other way in order to head them off."

"What other way, young man?" growled the sergeant. "What do you mean?"

"Why," replied Herbert, out of breath, "Mr. Burr sent me for the police, but just as I got to the door I met the gang coming in. They knew me, and knew that I was up to nothing good for them, so they took me in tow, and started to take me to another dive of the old man's. I went along like a little lamb till we got down to Avenue A, and there I happened to see another gang of the old man's fellows that I had done a good deal for at one time and another, and I gave them a distress signal. There were about a dozen of them, while there were only two of them leading me away to slaughter. Well, those dozen fellows just rolled up their

sleeves and went for those two, and say, it was just fun! The way they made those two chaps bite the dust, was a beauty and a delight! Say, they'll have to use a spool of thread to sew up all their slits and gashes!"

"Well, you finally got away from them," interposed Thad. "What then?"

"As soon as I got away from my captors I lost no time in reaching a telephone station and sent in a call, in your name, Mr. Burr, and then returned to the front of the building."

"Pretty soon—sooner than I knew it was possible for the police I had called to get there—here came a patrol wagon. Somehow I didn't believe it was the same ones I'd sent for, and so I waited. In a moment along came another one, and I knew that was the one that had responded to my call, and I told them to go round to the next street. They took my advice, although they grumbled a good deal, and then I showed them the entrance of the secret passage which is in the basement of a saloon, and the saloon is one of the old man's policy shops. As soon as the cops got inside of the tunnel they heard the gang coming through, and then I knew there was going to be fun if you fellows worked your end right."

"I guess we'll do that," returned Thad. "But how did you know about the existence of this tunnel?"

"Oh, there's mighty little that the old man has that I don't know about," laughed Herbert.

"I should judge so. But our game seems to have stopped. I don't hear them any longer."

Herbert put his head in at the door and listened.

"They're probably sneaking along quietly to make the police think they're not there," he suggested.

"There is no way for them to switch off, is there?"

"No, they've got to come back the same way they went or drop into the hands of the police."

"Oh, well, in that case we have nothing to fear. If the other squad doesn't capture them, we will."

"What's become of Ned?" asked Herbert, after looking around for some moments.

"He's with the crowd," replied Thad.

"With the crowd?"

"Yes."

"How did that happen? You don't mean to say he's—"

"Simply captured by them as they swept up the stairs and carried him along with them, that's all."

"Poor Ned, I hope they will do him no harm."

"Oh, I hardly think they will."

At that moment they heard the sound of footsteps as of a lot of people climbing stairs.

"There they come!" cried Herbert enthusiastically. "We'll have them now."

Acting on the detective's advice, the sergeant drew his men into the outer room and there awaited the arrival of the ruffians, while Thad and Herbert concealed themselves in the dark corners of the bedroom.

They had not long to wait.

The head of the column of toughs soon filed through the door into the room.

Thad allowed them to pass in silence, and they paused before reaching the curtain which separated the bedroom, and waited for the rear ones to come up.

It was too dark in the room to distinguish anybody's face, and Thad strained his eyes to try to ascertain whether Ned was with them or not.

When all the crowd had filed in the leader addressed his gang.

"Now, b'yes, we've got to make a bould dash. Ol don' believe thim police is in froont, but if they air, we've got to foight thim, thot's all. March!"

With that the gang pushed past the curtain into the outer room, and then came a scene of wild excitement.

They did not realize their predicament until the police had them surrounded, their pistols leveled at them and had ordered them to surrender.

With a few exceptions they all surrendered without much resistance. Some few held out and had to be clubbed into submission,

but it was not long before they were all disarmed and drawn up in line for marching.

Burr had emerged from the back room as soon as the tail of the column had filed out, and began to scrutinize the faces of the twenty or more men for the purpose of discovering the two in which he was most interested—that of Banks and Ned.

But to his surprise and consternation neither of them was there.

What could it mean?

Then he thought that the other squad of police had probably captured Banks, and that Ned had joined them.

A portion of the mystery was soon solved, for the other squad of police arrived shortly after, and among them was the young detective, as Thad had anticipated. But Banks was not there, nor did any of them know anything about him.

"Where could he have gone?" questioned Burr, referring to Herbert, who alone was familiar with the secret passage.

"It's as much of a mystery to me as it is to you, Mr. Burr," replied Herbert. "So far as I know, there is no way of getting out of the tunnel except the two ends."

"Did you see him, Ned?" he asked, "after you got into the tunnel with the gang?"

"See him?" ejaculated Ned. "You couldn't see anything in there, though I supposed he was with us until you just now made the discovery that he wasn't."

"Well, sergeant," said Thad, "you may as well take the rest of the gang to the station, and I take a few men and go back through the tunnel and see if we can discover how that fellow escaped. Of course, there is no such thing as finding him now, but we may find out which way he went, which will be some satisfaction."

Accompanied by half a dozen men, Thad went back through the tunnel, while Herbert took Ned away with him.

But the detective's search was fruitless.

A thorough examination of the tunnel revealed nothing which tended to clear the mystery of how the policy king had escaped, much less where he had gone.

"Never mind," he said at last, when every resource had been exhausted, "I'll have him yet. He cannot escape me. There is one hold I have on the scoundrel," he pursued after a little reflection. "In our squabble I remember inflicting a pretty bad wound in his hand. I shall be able to recognize that if we meet again."

Thad then took leave of the police and being anxious about the condition of Lottie, directed his steps in the direction of the apartment-house in Fifty-seventh street and Columbus avenue.

He had no difficulty in finding the particular apartment to which she had gone, and was ushered in with great cordiality.

There he not only found the girl, who was bright and happy, but also Ned and Herbert.

"I am very happy!" cried Lottie as soon as she saw the detective, "and I have good reason for being so. You have not only restored me to life and liberty, but you have saved my brother and restored him to me."

"Your brother?"

Thad was mystified, and looked from one to another of the several smiling faces about him.

"Here he is," cried Lottie, putting her arm about Ned, who sat next to her. "We understand now why Banks wished to put us out of the way."

CHAPTER XXI.

STRANGE REVELATIONS.

THE hint thrown out by Lottie attracted Thad's interest at once.

He had assigned no other reason for the policy king's oppression of the two young people than the fact that the one had disobeyed his commands, or rather refused to comply with his demands in becoming his mistress; and the other for proving a traitor to his cause of rascality.

But from this hint it appeared that he had another reason, and the detective was interested at once.

"Why did he wish to put you out of the way?" he asked.

"Because," replied Ned, "my sister and

I, who are the heirs of Banks's sister, are the heirs of all the property, or the most of it, which he now calls his own."

"Indeed? Then he did not make it all in the policy business, as he claims?"

"No, nor half of it. The house where he lives and another one on Fifth avenue belong to us."

"Still, you will let him keep them?" laughed Thad.

"Oh, yes, certainly!" laughed Ned.

"However, he won't need them," interjected Lottie, "as you will give him a home up on the island, won't you, Mr. Burr?"

"I shall do my part in that direction," he replied. "However, I have to catch him yet."

"Haven't you caught him?" gasped Ned.

"Not yet, my boy."

"Was there no sign of him in the tunnel?"

"Not the slightest."

"That is very strange."

"It is strange, but no more than we may expect of a man of his keenness. By the way, Herbert, you are also a nephew of this man. You must be a cousin of these two?"

"Yes, I am a cousin, but not one of the fortunate ones," replied Herbert with a little bitterness.

"Don't say that, cousin," protested Lottie, coloring still more. "Only, being my first cousin, I could not think of having a great fortune without sharing with him."

"Oh, certainly not!" laughed the detective. "And it is most commendable in you to feel that way."

Nothing more was said on the subject but the faces of the cousins, the suffused cheeks and the downcast eyes, told as plainly as words that there was something besides distant relationship between them.

"There is something I want to ask you, Herbert," said Thad, after they had talked on for some time.

"What is that, sir?" asked the boy bashfully.

"The night you gave me the warning you mentioned the fact that you were the valued lady whom I had seen coming out of the lawyer's office, which fact I verified as soon as I saw you in the light. What were you doing in there—if you have no objection to telling me?"

"I have no objection telling you," replied Herbert. "I was in there to see the lawyer, with a view to discovering something about Ned's whereabouts, if possible."

"You expected that he might know something about it, then?"

"Yes, sir. In fact, I was quite sure that he knew. The only trouble was to get him to tell."

"What success had you?"

"None."

"He would not tell?"

"No, sir."

"You did not ask bluntly where Ned was, or whether the lawyer knew where he was, did you?"

"No, sir. I depended upon asking a number of roundabout questions about the family in general."

"But he did not betray himself?"

"Oh, no. He was too cautious for that."

"Perhaps, after all, he did not know."

"Yes, I think he did."

"Did he suspect that you were not a woman?"

"Not for an instant."

"Did you keep your veil over your face during the whole time you were talking to him?"

"No, sir, I raised my veil."

"And yet he did not recognize you?"

"He did not. You see I was really upset that he would not have known me any way."

"Now, there is one thing that has perplexed me ever since I first started on this case. From the moment I met that lawyer I was vaguely of the opinion that he and Edward Banks were one and the same man. Do you know whether I am right or not?"

"You are wrong," replied Herbert, emphatically.

"Are you sure about that, Herbert?" interposed Ned. "Because I have often thought the same thing."

"Quite sure."

"You have been with them both a great deal, I suppose?"

"Yes, at one time or another, although there was never much familiarity between us. Neither of them is a man to permit that."

"Have you ever seen them together?"

"I don't remember about that. But it would not be strange if I never did, for they were never on very good terms, I have always understood."

"You ought to know something about this, Miss Preston," observed the detective, addressing the girl. "You were brought up by the lawyer, were you not?"

"Oh, no," she replied. "I only lived with him a short time."

"Indeed? I thought you had always lived with him."

"No, sir, only a year, I think, not more."

"Where were you brought up?"

"In St. Louis."

"With your parents?"

"Yes, sir."

"How is it that you and Ned did not know of each other's whereabouts?"

"That was because I ran away from home when I was very young," answered Ned.

"How did you come to recognize each other to-day?"

"That was all Herbert's doings," put in Lottie. "It was he who brought us together."

"Then you knew that they were brother and sister, did you?"

"Yes," replied Herbert. "That is, I knew that Ned had a sister somewhere, and when I told him about Lottie—whom I had known a long time—he thought she might be his sister; so, as soon as they met, it did not take long for them to discover that they were the brother and sister who had been separated so long."

"You have done a noble piece of work, my boy," cried Thad, grasping his hand. "You shall be my worthy assistant from now on."

"But it is you we all have to thank," insisted Herbert modestly. "None of us could have done anything only for you."

"Ay, but you and Ned have both done your part, and done it excellently," declared the detective. "But, how did you come to assume the woman's costume, Herbert?"

"I could take that character better than any other, as I had often played a woman's part on the stage, for one thing. And another reason was, that I knew a woman would have a better chance of gaining Banks's confidence than a man."

"Nevertheless, you did not succeed in finding where Ned was, with all your cleverness?"

"Not from him. As I told you, I suspected that he was in the clutches of Edward Banks, and for that reason watched his house, and in that way gained the information I wanted."

"When you first led me to the room where Ned was confined I noticed that you had a key. Where did you get that?"

"From the old man," responded Herbert, laughing.

"You don't mean to say that he gave it to you?"

"Not much! He don't love me well enough for that. I picked his pocket."

"Picked his pocket? When?"

"The very night I gave you the warning."

"Indeed? Before or after you gave me the warning?"

"After."

"Then you followed us back to the house?"

"Not then. The fact of it is, after delivering the message to you I slipped round to the opposite side of the carriage and, just as he was about to step into the carriage my fingers went through his pockets about as lively as a mouse goes through a hole."

"And you got the key?"

"I did."

"Did you get anything else?"

"Nothing but some letters."

"What did you do with the letters?"

"I have them here."

"Have you looked at them?"

"Some of them."

"Are they of any importance? I mean do they throw any light on the mystery that we are trying to solve?"

"No, so far as I see, they do not."

"Let me see them."

"With pleasure."

Herbert handed out three or four letters, and the detective took them and looked them over.

As Herbert had suggested, there was nothing of importance in them, at least not in the first three he examined.

But then he came to another one which attracted his attention from the fact that it was addressed to Howard Preston.

It read as follows:

"DEAR HOWARD:—

"I hear that the will is in Lottie's possession, although she is not aware of the fact. What you suggest about getting her out of the way is all right. When you have accomplished this, look through her effects, and you will find an old testament which you will see was presented to her by her mother. The book has a false cover, and in that cover you will find the will. As I say, she is not aware of its existence, but it is there, just the same."

"Your other proposition of having Stella impersonate Lottie is a good one, as it will be necessary to have a daughter of the legator appear in order to get the property. But, there are two other matters you must not forget: One is, that the girl must not be put out of the way in a manner that will cause suspicion, as the matter will be looked into thoroughly; and the other is, that she has a brother who is equal legatee to the property. His name is Edward or Ned, and he is now in the detective service. It will be very necessary to get him out of the way, as he is a very keen fellow and, being a detective, will make it all the worse for you."

"I hope you may be able to carry out all these details successfully, and if you do, one-third of the property shall be yours as a compensation for your work."

"Very sincerely,

"NED."

When the detective had finished reading the note he handed it back to Herbert with the interrogatory:

"Didn't you read that one, my boy?"

Herbert glanced it over and changed color.

"No, upon my life, I overlooked that one," he replied.

"The very one you should have read, above all others."

"So I see now. I do not see how I should have been so stupid."

He proceeded to read it over carefully; that done he handed it to Ned, who also read it, turned red and pale by turns, and then gave it to Lottie.

When she had finished the letter she looked at the young men as if for an explanation.

"What does it mean?" she finally asked.

"You have me," rejoined Herbert, with a puzzled expression.

"I'll never tell you," added Ned, equally mystified.

"Perhaps some of you can tell who Howard Preston is?" suggested Thad.

Everybody was silent for some seconds; then Herbert answered:

"I used to know him, and I think Lottie did."

The girl colored very much and stammered something to the effect that she had once known him.

"Well" interposed the detective, "as you see by the date, this is dated at St. Louis, and has not been written more than a week. This was about the time that Banks engaged me to operate upon you two people. I should judge by that that he had already begun the slow process of poisoning Miss Lottie here, and perhaps also Ned, but after receiving this letter he became afraid to proceed in that way lest he should be discovered, and concluded to change the method. That was why he jumped so readily at my proposition when I offered to put the patients out of the way without leaving anything behind for chemists to discover."

"But the mystery still remains, who is Howard Preston, and where is he? The letter appears to have been written by Banks himself. This renders it all the more puzzling. If it had been written by this man Preston to Banks the thing would have been clear enough. But it appears to have been written by Banks, and dated at St. Louis, and yet it not only pertains to his

affairs but was found in his possession. What are we to think of it?"

Everybody was again silent for some seconds; then Herbert ventured:

"In my opinion it was written by Preston to Banks, and they have changed names for a purpose."

"What can that purpose be? Or rather, what could they possibly hope to gain by a scheme of that kind? Now, if they wanted to cover up their identity why did they not use different names entirely?"

Herbert shook his head.

"I don't pretend to answer for this man's curious freaks, and I certainly shall not attempt to explain this riddle."

"I'll tell you what I think about it," ventured Ned: "This letter never was written in St. Louis at all, but right here in New York, and Howard Preston is some tool of Banks's whom he has hired to carry out this work."

"But how came it in his possession?" persisted Thad.

"That I cannot engage to explain."

"You are sure there really was a person named Howard Preston, are you, Herbert?"

"Oh, certainly. I knew him well."

"But you do not know what has become of him?"

"I do not."

"Well, my opinion is that, although there was really a person by that name, the name is used in this instance in a fictitious sense. The letter has been written by some person at St. Louis who knew the secret of the concealed will and was willing to divide with Banks for having him carry out the infamous plot, knowing that he could select no more worthy person for the job. To prevent the possibility of discovery he has had the letter addressed to this fictitious person or name."

"Well, what is your course, Mr. Burr?" asked Herbert after a season of reflection.

"We have two great works before us. One, to catch this fellow Banks, and the other to find that will."

"That will not be hard," suggested Lottie, "as the testament referred to is in my trunk at the house."

"If he has not already found it and removed the will," interjected Thad.

CHAPTER XXII.

DISAPPOINTED SEARCHERS.

WHEN Detective Burr took leave of his young friends (that is, Ned and Lottie, for Herbert went with him), he discovered that it was afternoon, and he also remembered that he had fasted since the previous night.

He therefore suggested to his young companion that they go to a restaurant and get something to eat.

This they did, and while they discussed the viands, employed the time additionally in talking over the case upon which they were engaged.

"My first move will be to go home and disguise myself, and then make an effort to see Stella," began the detective. "If I can see her, and she is in sympathy with our cause, we shall have no difficulty in gaining our point."

"I may be able to help you in that," ventured Herbert with his usual modesty.

"I have no doubt of it," replied Thad, warmly. "You are very clever in your schemes. By the way, what have you to suggest?"

"In the first place, my plan would be to disguise myself as the veiled woman again and go to the house. Stella has already seen me in this make-up, and I can readily secure an interview with her. If you like you might also make up as a woman and we will go there as a couple of women. Let me see, what will be our excuse?"

"Dressmakers, by all means," rejoined Thad. "That is an old trick of mine, and I have never had it fail."

"Very well, we'll go as a couple of dressmakers," assented Herbert. "I have some cards, one of which I used before, with the name of Helen Vernon. Stella knows that, and I'll use one of them. That will insure our entrance into the house."

"That is all we want. Once we get inside, our work will be comparatively easy. But have you the dresses, my boy?"

"No, unless we go back to the place in

First avenue where Ned was confined. I left my rig there."

"Never mind. You come with me. I have all the dresses you want. They may be a trifle large in the girth for you, but if we can do no better my wife will let us have a rig that will certainly fit you. But see the fat party over there!" he suddenly broke off. "He has been watching us with the greatest interest ever since we sat down."

"Where?" asked Herbert.

"At the third table, facing us. The red-faced man."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Herbert.

"What is the matter?"

"That is one of the old man's spies! I'll bet he's been following us."

"What for?"

"To learn where we are going and what we are up to."

"Do you imagine he knows us?"

"Of course he does. There is not a detective in the city that he doesn't know."

"He looks rather fat to do much spying," observed Thad.

"Nevertheless, there are very few detectives who manage to get ahead of him."

"Well, here will be one that will give him a hard rub, smiled the detective. "If he attempts to shadow when we leave here I'll give him a game that he never dreamed of."

"You'll find a queer customer to deal with," smiled Herbert, who was acquainted with the spy's silent habit.

"How so?" asked the detective.

"Wait until you tackle him, and you'll see."

"Fight?"

"No. Wouldn't hurt a fly. That isn't the game."

"Well, I don't mind wasting a little time for the sake of a little fun with him."

Shortly afterward Thad and his companion left the restaurant, and, as they expected, their shadower was close behind them.

Thad affected not to see him, and walked on down the street.

Pretty soon the detective and his friend boarded a street car.

The spy did the same, apparently taking no pains to conceal the fact that he was following them.

Thad rode a couple of blocks and jumped off.

The spy followed.

Burr immediately took another car going in an opposite direction.

The spy looked a little foolish, but finally decided not to be got rid of in that way, and also got in.

Again the detective rode but a couple of blocks, and jumped off.

The spy, who was becoming visibly worried by this time, followed him, and now Thad turned into a side street and walked as though his life depended upon it.

The spy, being fat and short-winded, had some difficulty in keeping him in sight, but managed to do so.

Thad turned a corner and continued on round the block.

Finally, by dint of rapid walking, he managed to distance the spy, and turned a corner long enough before he reached it to be able to conceal himself in a doorway before the spy turned the corner.

The fellow came puffing along, looking about in every direction for his fugitives.

At length he came opposite the doorway where Thad and Herbert were standing, and before the fellow was aware what was in store for him, Thad sprang out and collared him.

The fellow showed a slight indication of surprise at first, but soon succeeded in resuming his air of stolid indifference.

Thad clung to his collar with one hand, and drawing his revolver with the other, demanded:

"What do you mean, fellow, by dogging my steps wherever I go?"

To his astonishment the fellow made no response, and even affected not to see him.

Herbert was ready to split his sides, for this was exactly what he knew the spy would do.

But the fellow soon found he had a different customer to deal with than when Ned had tackled him.

His efforts to release himself were vain, and Thad continued:

"Oh, you propose to affect the idiot act,

eh? Very well, I would as soon run you in on that as anything else, although I know and can prove that you are an employee of the notorious policy king, Banks."

In spite of the fellow's coolness, he could not avoid a little nervousness at this and even 'changed color, but still did not speak.

He began seriously to try to release himself from the detective's grasp, but it was no use. He might as well have tried to have escaped from a vise.

"Come, Herbert!" called Thad. "Take an arm there, and we'll walk this scoundrel to the police station."

Herbert grasped the other arm, but the fellow, who was a powerful man, shook him loose, and glared at him with a dark scowl.

"Oh, that is your game, eh?" said Thad. "Very well, I'll put the irons on you! I'll see whether you shake them off!"

But the threat was only a bluff, for as will be remembered, the detective still had on the footman's coat and had no handcuffs about him.

Nevertheless, as he put his hand into his pocket as if to execute the threat, the spy suddenly recovered his senses.

"Hold on, sir!" he cried in a half dictatorial, half terrified voice. "What does all this mean?"

"Ah! I thought I'd induce you to find your tongue!" smiled Thad. "You want to know what this means, do you?"

"I do, sir," retorted the other indignantly.

"Well, sir, I will answer you when you tell me what you mean by following me."

"I wasn't following you, sir!"

"Do you mean to say that you did not follow me into the restaurant, out of the restaurant down the street, jump on a car when I did, and off again, along a side street for two blocks, and then clear around this block? How did that happen?"

"Oh, I just happened to be going the same way," replied the spy indifferently.

"Well, my dear sir, I must say that I admire you as a monumental liar, but despise your want of tact. I am truly surprised that a man of Edward Banks's sagacity should send out as stupid an ass as you are! Come, I shall have to lock you up as a suspicious character."

With that he gave the fellow a pull, but he stood like a post.

"Take that other arm, Herbert," commanded the detective, "and if he attempts to break loose this time I'll put the irons on him and then call the patrol!"

Just then a policeman hove in sight, and to Thad's surprise the fellow shouted at the top of his voice:

"Police! Help! Murder!"

The officer ran up to the spot and, after taking in the situation, asked:

"What's up here?"

"These fellows have assaulted me here and are trying to rob me," declared the spy.

The policeman looked at Thad, who was smiling, and before he could demand an explanation, the detective handed him his card.

"Ah, I thought it was something of this kind," remarked the officer. "Do you need any help, Mr. Burr?"

"Yes," replied Burr, "I would be glad if you would send in a call for a patrol-wagon. I don't care to be bothered with leading this chap to the station."

"With pleasure," said the officer, starting for the nearest patrol-box.

"Look here, officer!" called the spy, "am I to have no protection from these ruffians?"

"Oh, yes," smiled the policeman, "we'll give you protection. I'll put you in a place where they can't get at you."

With that he waved his hand at the disgruntled spy and walked away.

A few minutes later the patrol-wagon arrived and the fellow was whisked off to the station.

"That was somewhat of a surprise for that chap," laughed Herbert as they resumed their walk. "I had no idea you intended anything as severe as that."

"I didn't either; but it was the only alternative under the circumstances. I suppose he has never met with this sort of treatment before?"

"No, sir; he has always managed to bluff the detectives and get off somehow."

"Well, let us get home and prepare for to-night's work."

As soon as they reached Burr's residence in Thirty-fourth street, Thad led the way to his private office, or "studio," as he called it, and the two detectives proceeded to make themselves up for their evening's work.

Thad succeeded in finding a dress which fitted Herbert fairly well, and then came the work of making up his face.

Thad, who was an artist in this line, was forced to admire the young man for his genius in the same line.

When he had added the finishing touch to his work no one would have suspected that he was not what he represented—a rather plain spinster of thirty-five or so with a very grim visage.

Thad made himself up to represent a stout, middle-aged woman, who would be likely to wear the the trousers if she had been married and would stand no nonsense in any case.

By the time they had completed their task it was dinner-time.

So they walked into the dining-room as they were, to the amusement of Mrs. Burr and the children, and took dinner.

Thad marred the harmony of the situation a little after dinner by indulging in his usual cigar, which, his wife declared, threw a suspicion on his respectability as a decent woman.

A little before eight o'clock they took a carriage and drove out to Banks's residence in West End avenue, above Eighty-third street.

Herbert rung the door-bell, and when the footman appeared (it was not the same one whose coat Thad had borrowed), gave him the card with the name "Helen Vernon" printed on.

In a few minutes the footman returned with the information that Miss Banks would see them, and they were ushered into the parlor.

Stella, who only expected to see Herbert, was surprised to see the "big woman," but Herbert soon explained matters satisfactorily.

"You'd better come up to my room," said the girl, loud enough for any of the servants or anybody else who might be within hearing, "as I wish to speak to you about the other dress I want altered."

Thad then saw the wisdom of assuming the disguise he had. Had he been in male attire he could not have had this opportunity of a confidential interview.

Stella led the way up-stairs and opened the door to her room.

When the two "dressmakers" were inside she locked the door and then invited them to seats.

"I brought you here," she explained, "because whatever is said in here goes no further. The room used to be the private consultation room of a very bad man, and the walls are padded for that purpose, so that you might fire off a pistol in here and it would not be heard outside the door."

"That is fortunate," replied Thad, "for we may want to talk about matters that we don't want everybody to hear."

"That is what I supposed," rejoined Stella.

"Now to begin with, let me tell you the situation so that you may understand what we are after."

"I perhaps understand the situation better than you imagine," she said. "However, go on. I shall be glad to hear anything new."

Burr then went over the account of the struggle to capture her father, of his attempt to poison the two heirs to the property which he at present held, and finally of the letter supposed to have been written by Banks to a man by the name of Howard Preston. He then showed her the letter.

She read it over carefully, and to the detective's surprise, handed it back without a change of countenance.

And then in a perfectly calm, even tone she said:

"I have known all this for some time past, and have planned some little to extricate myself from the thralldom which confines me. But it was not until you came here as the doctor who was to first cure and then kill Lottie, that I saw my way clear. Now let me give you a piece of information which

will probably surprise you. This man Howard Preston who is mentioned in this letter is my father. It is with a good deal of sadness that I acknowledge it, but such is the melancholy truth. My father was convicted of a crime some years ago, and my grandfather disinherited him, leaving all the property to my aunt, who was Lottie and Ned's mother. Ever since then my father has been trying to get possession of the property.

"It was with a view to this that I was sent here to live with this man and impersonate his daughter."

"But that letter appears to have been written by Banks himself," interposed Thad.

"That was only done for a blind," she exclaimed. "The letter was in reality written by my father."

"To Edward Banks?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was the motive for transposing the names?"

"That I cannot tell, but I know that a great many of Banks's letters came addressed to Howard Preston. The only explanation I can think of is that, in case he could get possession of the will, Banks thinks he could succeed better with my father's name than with his own."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MORE REVELATIONS.

THAD was both astonished and interested at what he heard, and was all the more anxious on that account to hear more before proceeding with the investigation for which he had come there.

"Your father is in St. Louis, then, Miss—Miss—"

"Preston," she interposed, seeing that he either hesitated or had forgotten her name.

"Yes, sir, he lives at St. Louis, although it would be difficult to tell where to find him even if you were there."

"Have you no scruples about having him arrested for his crimes?" he hesitated.

"None in the least. He is guilty of the most fiendish crimes, and I have no hesitancy in doing whatever lays in my power to bring him to justice."

"He is at the bottom of all these attempted murders, then?"

"He is."

"And what is Banks's part in it?"

"What you would call a cat's-paw."

"He does the dirty work, as it were?"

"Yes, sir."

"Still, he is very strict with you, is he not?"

"Not only strict but cruel, as far as he dare to be. Lately, however, he has been less so than formerly."

"How do you account for that?"

"I have come in possession of certain secrets of his, and he has come to fear me."

"How did you come out in your plot to get Lottie out the other night?"

"All right."

"Was he not astonished and enraged when he found that she had escaped?"

"Yes, greatly so, but he could trace the fault to no one but John, the footman, and so he was promptly discharged."

"Poor John!"

"Never mind. I have provided for him."

"But when he found you in bed—"

"He did not find me in bed," she interrupted.

"No?"

"No."

"How did you manage it?"

"Why, you see, I only remained in bed till the following morning, and that was for the purpose of fooling the attendant, whom I could not trust with the secret. All that time she never suspected that I was anybody but Lottie. The next morning while she was gone for my breakfast I hastily arose and slipped away to my own room."

"When she got back—"

"When she got back," interposed Stella, speaking very rapidly and excitedly, "there was a scene, of course. The girl aroused the house and there was a search throughout the house for Lottie. Of course they did not find her, and then Banks remembered seeing John letting somebody—a woman—out the night before and concluded that he had something to do with it, and so poor John had to walk."

"Did they not question you with regard to the matter?"

"Oh, certainly, but you never saw a more innocent person than I was. I hadn't seen Lottie since she got sick, which Banks and his wife believed, as they had forbidden me to go to her room."

"Very cleverly planned and carried out. I had no idea how you would end the affair. I was afraid you would get into trouble."

"No danger of that," cried the girl proudly. "I'm too cunning for these people."

"So I perceive," assented the detective. "But tell me, how long have you been here?"

"Ten years—ever since I was a little girl."

"You ought to know a good deal about these folks then."

"Yes, I am pretty well acquainted with them."

"Do you know his brother?"

"Banks's brother?"

"Yes."

"I have seen him often."

"Here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you ever seen him in company with Edward?"

"I don't believe I have. You see they are not on good terms, and Thomas only comes when his brother is away."

Burr was more puzzled than ever.

He was pretty well convinced by this time that there were really two of them—that Edward and the lawyer were not one and the same, but the mystery was that he could find nobody that had ever seen them together. The excuse that they were not on good terms partly explained that, but the detective was still unsatisfied.

He still believed that there was a mystery somewhere behind it all, and would not be content until he had solved it.

"You are not sure, then, that what are known as the two brothers are not one and the same man?" he asked.

Stella stared at him in astonishment.

"Why, what do you mean?" she cried.

"I mean that in my opinion there is but one, and that he changes his character and name to suit the occasion."

"That is impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Because Thomas has been here when I knew that Edward was in St. Louis."

"You knew he was there?"

"Yes."

"How did you know he was there?"

"I saw letters from him."

"You were sure that they were from him?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Might not they have been from some one else—say your father?"

"No, I hardly think so."

"You do not believe it to be possible for you to have been mistaken in this?"

"I do not."

"Well, I sha'n't dispute you, but I shall still have my opinion until I am convinced to the contrary."

"And that is?"

"That there is but one."

"Then, I am sure you will find you are mistaken."

"Perhaps. But there is another question I want to ask you?"

"What is that?"

"Lottie was here about a year, wasn't she?"

"Yes, about that."

"What were her relations to Edward Banks?"

"Nothing more than that which a pure girl should be," replied Stella with some spirit.

"You are sure of this?"

"Positive."

"Did she not come here under the impression that she was his wife?"

The girl blushed.

"How did you learn that?" she asked.

"She told me for one thing, but I found it out in another direction."

"Well, I'll tell how that was. Lottie, like many a foolish girl, who falls in love with a man older than herself, became infatuated with my father, who is a very handsome man, but he was too honorable to allow her to be deceived and told her plainly that he was a married man, and then

shortly afterward went away. Then Banks, hearing of the affair, paid court to her, and although she did not care for him, out of sheer desperation, agreed to marry him. She did not know that he already had a wife, and they were married."

"Was it a valid marriage?"

"Yes."

"How is it they never assumed the relations of man and wife?"

"She discovered that he was married an hour after the ceremony, and when she confronted him about it, he confessed, and promised that if she would not have him arrested or say anything about it he would give her a home for the rest of her life and treat her as his own daughter."

"Did she tell you this at once?"

"Yes, that very day."

"And has he kept his promise?"

"He has, until recently. Up to the time of his attempt to put her out of the way he treated her the same as he did me."

"He has no children of his own, then?"

"No, sir."

Thad reflected some moments, and then resumed:

"You see by that letter, Miss Preston, that there is a will concealed among Lottie's effects. Do you know anything about the testament alluded to there?"

"I have seen it, and have no doubt that it is in her trunk."

"Will it be possible to get at it, do you suppose?"

"I presume there will be no difficulty."

"I think we had better get the testament and secure the will for her before Banks gets hold of it."

"I'm afraid we are too late about that."

"I am, too. But there may be a chance."

"I do not have much hopes of it."

"Why, have you seen anything?"

"No, only I know that he has ransacked her effects since she went away, and it will be a miracle if he has not taken the will."

"I admit the hopelessness of the case, especially as he had had that letter, and knew that the will was there. Still, there can be no harm in trying."

"No, there can be no harm in trying," she echoed.

"Are you alone in the house?"

"No, sir, Mr. Banks and his wife are both here. Besides, there was a stranger came just a little while before you arrived."

"Lottie's room is the one where she was when she was sick, is it not?"

"No, sir, her regular room is next to mine."

"That is good, as it simplifies matters."

"I don't know about that, as mamma's room—that is, Mrs. Banks's room—is the next one, and he may be in there."

"Let us try, anyway," Thad insisted, eagerly.

"Very well," assented Stella, reluctantly, at last. "Let me see, what excuse can I make for wanting to go in there?"

"Can't we slip in?"

"Not very well."

"Why not?"

"Somebody will be sure to be spying."

"Well, concoct some excuse, then."

"I have it. We'll march boldly in, and if anybody comes to ask questions, I'll tell them that I want to find something of mine which Lottie had."

"Shall we go with you?"

"No, I think it will be better for me to go alone."

"Very well. Go on, and we will wait here."

Stella left the room and was gone for a long time.

"I wonder if we can trust her?" said Thad, as soon as she left the room.

"Yes, with your life," returned Herbert.

"She is too noble a girl to betray any one."

"She does not resemble her father, then?"

"Not in that respect."

After she had been gone about half an hour she returned.

Thad knew by the expression of her face that she had failed.

Disappointment was written on every line of her face.

"You didn't find it, eh?" he said.

"No, sir," she almost whimpered. "I have been through every article of Lottie's, and the book is not there."

"Did it look as if somebody else had been there before you?"

"Yes, that was evident everywhere. There wasn't a thing in its place. There is no doubt that he has got the book."

"That is bad," growled the detective. "Having got possession of it, there is no telling where or when we will secure it."

"Perhaps when we arrest him he will tell where it is," suggested Herbert.

"That is just what he would not do," retorted Thad. "No, we must get that will before we arrest him, otherwise we will never get it."

"I don't want to put my opinion against yours, Mr. Burr," ventured Herbert modestly, "but there is one thing, you are not as well acquainted with this man as I am."

"That is true, my boy," admitted the detective softening.

"And knowing him as I do," he went on, "and knowing that he is an arrant coward at heart, I would suggest that we arrest him first, for I am sure he will give up anything rather than have it appear against him."

"Perhaps, if that was the last resort, but he would as soon destroy it as give it up, and a good deal sooner."

"I think Herbert is right," suggested Stella. "If you arrest him, say to-night, so that he will have no chance of going after the will or making any arrangements about it, you can then go on and search for it just the same as you can now, and you won't have him to contend with."

"That is a sensible view of it," declared the detective, "and I shall act upon the suggestion. Do you think he is in the house at present?"

"I believe he is."

"Then I'll tell you what you do. You go to him and tell him you would like to have him see the dressmaker. You can make up any story in connection therewith you like, only get him in here or in the parlor so that I can get at him."

"I will see what I can do," answered Stella, rising. "But I'm afraid it won't be a success."

"Why?"

"He does not like to bother with my affairs, or any women affairs, especially when he is busy, and as I told you, he has a stranger with him."

"Well, try, and if you fail, we shall have to try some other plan."

She went away, even less hopeful of success than before.

In a little while she returned with a gloomy countenance.

"He won't see anybody," she said as soon as she came in.

"Did you tell him that the dressmaker wanted to see him?"

"Yes, sir, and he said the dressmaker be hanged!"

"Well, the dressmaker will hang him!" cried Thad, jumping to his feet. "I shall call upon him myself. Come, Herbert!"

And before Stella could interpose a protest, he was out of the room.

A moment later he rapped vigorously at Banks's door.

A servant opened it, much to the detective's disappointment.

"I want to see Mr. Banks," he demanded.

"Well, you can't see him to-night!" replied the servant, and attempted to close the door.

But Thad thrust his foot in in time to prevent this, and before the servant was aware of what he was about to do, hurled him out of the way and rushed in.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ANOTHER SLIP.

IN an instant Thad was in the inner apartment.

There was an inner and an outer apartment, and the servant had been placed in the outer apartment or ante room to prevent unwelcome visitors from coming in.

But the detective had taken them by surprise.

So rapid had been his entrance that the policy king was taken off his guard.

He was sitting at a table with another man, drinking and smoking.

As Burr passed the *portiere* separating the two rooms there was nothing between him and the game but a brass railing.

This ran across the room in such a way as to shut out visitors, except they went around it, which was a considerable distance.

Thad took in the situation, and resolved upon a plan.

First he took a good look at his man to make sure that he was not mistaken, and casually glanced at his companion.

The moment he did so, he was struck dumb with surprise.

It was undoubtedly the face of the man he had seen in the photograph at the lawyer's house, in other words, that of Howard Preston.

This caused him to hesitate a little.

Meanwhile the policy king looked up with an indifferent expression, and inquired in a matter of fact tone:

"Well, madam, what is it?"

Thad realized that it was necessary to give some excuse for being there, so he replied in the tone of an agitated female:

"I want to know, sir, if I'm ever to get my money for your daughter's dresses that I've made for her, or not?"

Banks eyed him coolly, and then said:

"You'd better see her about that, my good woman. I have nothing to do with the affair."

"But you have the paying of the bills, and she says you refuse to pay my last bill."

"Well, you tell her to bring the bill to me and I'll give her the money. Now clear out of here, and don't dare to come into my presence again!"

This was what Thad was working for.

If he could arouse the fellow's indignation, he thought, and get him to come from behind the railing, he would be all right.

So he retorted to Banks's last speech:

"I'll not go to her again. She's refused me the money and ordered me out of the house, and now you do the same. Now, sir, if you don't pay me right here and now, I'll blow the top of your head off in about two seconds!"

Burr thought this would surely bring him out, but it didn't.

He therefore concluded to try another plan.

He would proceed behind the railing, but did not propose to walk clear round it.

He would jump over it, and putting his hand on the railing, was about to do this.

But at that moment Banks touched a button, and the next instant the detective was lying flat on his back.

The fellow had turned on an electric current.

The current was a powerful one and gave the detective a severe shock.

But not strong enough to produce unconsciousness or result fatally.

However, he was sufficiently stunned to cause him to remain prostrate for a few seconds.

During which he heard a derisive laugh on the other side of the railing, followed by a shuffling of feet.

Thad soon pulled himself together, and regained his feet.

But he was too late to carry out the purpose for which he had come into the place.

The game had flown.

He knew then that the policy man must have suspected his identity.

Perhaps he had known it. Maybe some of the spies had notified him in time.

At all events he was gone, and he would hardly have left if he had believed the person who had just entered his office to have been nothing but an innocent old dressmaker.

Taking a little more time now he walked behind the railing and looked about.

There was no one to be seen.

Then for the first time since they entered the room did his mind revert to Herbert, and he turned to look for him.

Herbert was standing directly behind him, only on the other side of the railing.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Burr?" he asked, scarcely able to keep a straight face.

"No, I'm not hurt," replied Thad. "But what the deuce are you grinning about?"

At this the boy burst out into a loud fit of laughter.

Thad could not refrain from joining him, in spite of the gravity of the situation.

"Forgive me, Mr. Burr," pleaded the young man, "but if I were to be hanged for it, I could not have refrained from laughing,

you looked so funny as you flopped down like a great bouncing Irish washerwoman. It was too ridiculous for anything."

"I have no doubt of it. But who would have thought the rascal had that railing charged with electricity?"

"I could have told you if I had thought of it, but at the moment I had forgotten all about it."

"He must have suspected who we were."

"I know he did."

"How did he know it?"

"Why, just as you had passed the curtain there and I was about to raise it a fellow came to the door and spoke to the servant at the door."

"A spy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear what he said?"

"No, but he must have given warning, for the servant touched an enunciator at the side of the door, and it was at that very instant that the old man turned on the current."

"That is very strange."

"He is not to be caught napping."

"So I have learned to my cost."

"Well, there is no use of our staying here any longer, detective. Now that he has had warning, he'll get away from here in short order."

"I have no doubt of it."

"Did you notice the other man?" asked Herbert.

"Yes."

"You did not recognize him, of course?"

"On the contrary, I did," said the detective. "It was Howard Preston."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Only his picture, but I would know him anywhere."

"Did you notice anything peculiar about him?"

"Nothing except that he resembles me somewhat."

"He's the very picture of you, Mr. Burr."

"So I have been led to believe before to-day."

"How was that?"

"I have been mistaken for him."

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"Thomas Banks, the lawyer."

"The day you came into his office and saw me coming out?"

"Precisely."

"Did anybody else mistake you for Preston?"

"Yes, two or three others."

"Well, do you know that you fooled me," laughed Herbert. "When I met you on that occasion I was sure that it was Preston."

"Then the resemblance must be striking."

"It is. I never saw anything like it."

"Well, let us get out of here. That fellow is not to be found to-night, evidently."

"No, we shall not be able to find him to-night."

"But to-morrow, I shall have him, and the will too."

"Sure?"

"If I don't, say I'm no detective."

"What is your plan?"

"That I cannot tell just yet, but I have a plan that will wind this thing up in short order."

The two men then returned to Stella's room.

She was anxiously awaiting them.

"What success?" she asked.

"None, as we might have expected," replied Thad rather despondently, for him.

"What was the cause?"

Burr related the circumstances of the adventure.

"I had no idea you were bent upon rushing in upon him like that," she averred, "or I should have warned you. He is very proud of that invention."

"Well, it served him this time, but it will never do so again," promised the detective solemnly.

"Have you destroyed it?"

"No, but I shall have him in irons before this time to-morrow night."

"Would it not be a good idea to destroy his electric machine?" suggested Herbert.

"No, it is not worth while. Besides it may come in good as evidence against him, as showing how he guarded his life and

person from detectives and everybody else."

"Well, I hope that you may be able to catch him," said Stella earnestly.

"Oh, never fear about that," exclaimed Thad. "I shall have him before another sun goes down. But why are you so anxious that he should be arrested, Miss Preston?"

"Because he is a base villain, who has done no end of wrong to many innocent people."

"You too, then, have suffered at his hands?"

"I have. He has robbed me of a home and friends. But I will tell you all about that some other time."

"But he intended to get this property for you, did he not?"

"By no means. He only desired to use my name in order to get it for himself. Besides, even if it were for me, it would be robbing those to whom it rightfully belongs."

"You are a noble woman, and I shall do my best to carry out this case as you would wish it. But we must be off. Good-night. Come, Herbert."

Considering that he had sufficient evidence against Howard Preston to justify him in arresting the fellow, Thad went to a police justice the following morning and procured a warrant for him.

Then believing that he would be found in company with Banks, if he could be found, he started out in search of that worthy individual.

Burr was still impressed with the idea that there was but one Banks, and acting upon this theory, determined upon a visit to the lawyer's office, which, he had learned, had been moved to Harlem, and started in that direction early in the forenoon, taking the Rapid Transit Train at the Grand Central Depot, at Forty-second street, and as he took his seat cast his eyes about him to see who was in the car besides himself.

To his utter surprise directly opposite him sat the very man he was looking for, Howard Preston.

A brilliant idea entered his head at once.

Whispering the fact of his discovery to Herbert, who sat beside him, disguised, the detective at once addressed Preston.

"Pardon me, my dear sir," he began, "but I must ask you to get off the train with me at the next station."

"What?" ejaculated the astonished man, looking up. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are my prisoner," answered Thad, presenting a revolver. "I have a warrant for your arrest. Your name is Howard Preston, I believe?"

"You—you are—mis—mistaken, sir!" stammered Preston. "My name is—"

"Never mind about trying to think of an alias. Your right name will do well enough, especially as I have a warrant made out in that name. I know you, and there is no use of trying to deceive me with any assumed name or character. Come!"

By this time the train had stopped at a station and, drawing his revolver and leveling it at the head of his prisoner, Thad marched him off onto the platform.

"Now we will just go back on the next train," said Thad. "I have some use for you before taking you to the police station."

"With that he marched from the up-town station across to the down-town station, where they took the first down-town train.

All this time Herbert was wondering what he was up to, but he did not learn till some time after.

Arrived at the Grand Central Depot again, the detective alighted with his prisoner and, to Herbert's greater surprise, marched him out to the street, took a cab and drove to his own house with him.

Here he was taken into the detective's private office, and then Thad made known his purpose for the first time.

"Take off your coat and vest, please," he commanded the prisoner, "and be lively about it."

"What is that for?" growled Preston.

"Never mind what for," said Thad. "Take them off. You will learn later, possibly."

The prisoner reluctantly obeyed the command, and as he did so, Burr put them on.

"Now let me have that cravat," he com-

manded. "It is rather a conspicuous one and apt to attract attention. I must have it. However, you shall have them all back in a little while."

The fellow still more reluctantly divested himself of his cravat and handed it to the detective.

Thad then gave him another coat, vest and cravat.

And then for half an hour or more he conversed with the prisoner on various topics, told funny stories to make the fellow laugh, vilified him in order to make him angry, and even told a pathetic story to work upon his feelings. And all this time the detective was studying the man. Studying the tone of his voice under different circumstances and in different moods, studying his every inflection, his laugh, his gestures, his manner of posing, and in fact everything about the man.

Meanwhile he was busy adding a few touches here and there to his make-up so as to render the likeness between himself and the prisoner still more perfect.

At the end of an hour his work was completed, and Thaddeus Burr and Howard Preston were so nearly the counterpart of each other in appearance, speech, gesture and every other respect that it would have taken a close observer to have distinguished one from the other.

"Now, my boy," he said, addressing Herbert, "I'll leave the prisoner in your charge until I get back. I think you can manage him; but for fear he might prove unruly, I'll just put these bracelets on him."

With that he handcuffed Preston.

CHAPTER XXV.

A SUCCESSFUL SCHEME.

As soon as Thad had perfected these arrangements, he put his young friend in charge of the prisoner, and left the house.

Taking a cab, he drove rapidly to the Grand Central Depot, where he took a Harlem train, and soon arrived at his destination.

Directing his steps toward the lawyer's office, a few minutes later he walked into the front room.

Affecting the exact voice of Preston, he asked:

"Is Mr. Banks in?"

The clerk looked up quickly, and recognizing his acquaintance, as he supposed, smiled, and said:

"Good-morning, Mr. Preston! Yes, sir, Mr. Banks is in, and is expecting you. Will you walk in?"

"Thanks," replied Thad, passing in through the railing.

A moment later he entered the lawyer's office.

"Hullo, Preston!" shouted the lawyer, springing up and grasping his hand. "What the deuce kept you so? I expected you an hour and a half ago."

"I tried to get up sooner," replied Thad, "but that occurrence last night worked upon my mind so that I didn't sleep very well, and was lazy about rising this morning."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the other. "You mustn't let such matters worry you, old fellow! I never let them bother me for ten minutes after their occurrence."

"That is because you are used to them. I am not, and they make me nervous. By the way, do you really think that the old woman was a detective in disguise?"

"Do I think so? Why, didn't I tell you last night that I knew him?"

"I believe you did say something about it."

"Say something about it? Why, you surely cannot have forgotten what I told you about the fellow. About the various adventures I have had with him, and how nearly he has had me in his grasp so many times, and how easily I gave him the slip?"

"I do recall it all now, but you know I was terribly nervous last night, and a good part of it had escaped my memory."

"Why, yes," pursued the lawyer, "he had me hemmed in in a tunnel the other morning, with a squad of policemen at each end, closing in upon me."

"How the deuce did you escape?"

"The easiest thing in the world. You

see it was as dark as Egypt in the tunnel, and, knowing every inch of it, I slipped into a niche in the wall in one place, and the excited police, pursuing the mob, passed right by without noticing me. As soon as they got by I quietly walked out the other end."

"Ah, you're a keen one, Banks, and no mistake!" laughed the detective.

"Too keen for those chaps," laughed the lawyer.

During this bit of gossip Thad had been studying the man before him, and had made one or two important discoveries.

In the first place he noticed that the lawyer had his left hand bandaged. This settled the question which had so long puzzled him, namely, that Edward Banks and Thomas Banks were one and the same, for the wounded hand was undoubtedly the result of the fight they had had in the hall of the tenement where Ned had been confined.

The man's conversation would have convinced him in itself, but this was additional proof.

As to the personal resemblance of the two characters, it was slightly diversified by the addition of a chin whisker in the case of the lawyer, while as the policy king he only wore a mustache.

This, the detective understood, was a simple matter, as the chin beard was false.

Otherwise the identification was perfect.

"You wanted to see me, I believe?" said Thad, breaking off suddenly.

"Yes," returned the other. "I want to fix up this matter of the will."

With that he reached over on his desk and picked up a document and handed it to the detective.

"You see," he pursued, "as you know, this will bequeaths all the property of the late Ferdinand Preston, to Caroline Preston, his daughter, in trust for her heirs, Edward and Lottie. Now, if we had succeeded in getting them out of the way, and substituted Stella for Lottie, claiming that Edward was dead, we could have recovered the property in her behalf, and then divided it between ourselves according to our agreement. But, that is all knocked in the head, and we have got to hit upon some other plan."

"Are the heirs aware of the existence of this will?" interposed Thad.

"No, not positively. They know there is a will of some sort, but they neither know the exact nature of it nor where it is."

"Then, I see no difficulty in fixing it up."

"What would you propose?" asked the lawyer eagerly.

"You know that at one time I had a good deal of influence over Lottie?"

This was a venture on the detective's part, based upon the vague outlines of the history of Howard Preston and the girl, but it was a lucky hit.

"I know you had," assented the lawyer, "but—"

"It is merely a matter of a little concession on my part and a little coddling that that influence may be regained."

"Do you think so?"

"I am positive of it."

"Well?"

"Well, suppose I go to her and, after renewing our friendship, inform her that I have the will, and that she is entitled, according to its tenets, to a certain amount of property—I'll fix it at a trivial amount."

"I see!" cried the lawyer, eagerly.

"I'll make the amount a mere fraction of what it really is; and, to render the thing more plausible, I'll pretend to read the clause from the will itself."

"First rate idea!" declared Banks gleefully.

"When I have satisfied her on this point," pursued the detective, "I shall propose to pay her the amount of her interest in the property in cash, in order that she may not be bothered with litigation, which would be necessary to secure the property."

"Good scheme!" assented the other, rubbing his hands.

"If she accepts," continued the detective, "our course is simple. We will pay her the trifling sum, whatever it is, on condition that she signs over the entire interest of the estate to us."

The lawyer reflected a moment, and then suddenly, as if seized with an inspiration, exclaimed:

"But hold on, my good fellow! We're forgetting a very important point."

"What is that?" asked the other indifferently.

"The boy! What are we to do with him? He will come in for his share."

"Undoubtedly," rejoined Thad coolly.

"But, it will be a simple matter to fix him."

"How, pray?" inquired the lawyer anxiously.

"In the first place, I shall approach him in the same way that I do the girl, and—"

"But that will entail another expenditure!" objected Banks.

"Suppose it does? The total amount will be so trifling that it will be a mere bagatelle in comparison to the bulk which we will get as our share."

"Do you think that better than—"

He hesitated, but Thad guessed his meaning, and replied:

"Yes, better and safer. Murder is always dangerous. They say that dead men tell no tales, but a more absurd proposition was never uttered. They always tell tales—sooner or later. I would rather have the signature of a living dupe than the blood of a dead one on my hands, and don't you forget it!"

"I guess you are right," assented the lawyer, after more reflection. "When do you propose to see the girl?"

"At once. The sooner the better. During the next day or two that detective will be scouring the town for you, and while he is thus engaged I will slip in and fix things up with the girl."

"But do you know where she is?"

"I do."

"The deuce! How did you discover it?"

"That is a secret of mine."

"Keep it," retorted the lawyer indignantly.

"So I shall, my good friend," smiled Thad. "It isn't best to always tell even your best friend some secrets."

"But you don't mind telling me where she is?" persisted Banks, appealingly!

Thad pretended to ponder the question. At length he said:

"I'll take you there."

"Will you?" cried the lawyer, gleefully.

"Yes. It will not be necessary for you to see her, but I will fix it so that you can be in a room next to the one in which I have her, and, as there is only one thin partition between, you can hear the whole conversation and bargain."

"Capital!" ejaculated the lawyer. "You are a genius, Preston!" he went on, slapping Thad on the back. "This is going to be a great success; I'm sure of it. Shall we go at once?"

"Yes, at once."

"Good! I'll be with you in a minute."

With that the lawyer jumped up, put on his hat and coat and announced himself as ready to go.

"This is about the softest bit of work I've struck for a long time!" mused the detective, as they passed from the office together. "I wonder what the rascal—this keen, shrewd king of cunning, will say when he finds himself in my little trap!"

And the detective could hardly refrain from laughing to himself at the thought.

However, he maintained a grave exterior and chatted along in a matter of fact way.

"I suppose the place is somewhere downtown?" suggested Banks, when they reached the street.

"Yes, in the neighborhood of Thirty fifth street," returned Thad. "We can take the Elevated."

"Elevated be hanged!" cried the happy lawyer. "No Elevated for me, with these prospects before me! We'll have a hack."

"Just as you say," submitted the detective, "if you are able to pay for it."

"Well, I should say I am, with half a million in prospect!"

Banks called a hack, and they entered it and drove away.

Twenty minutes later the hack turned into West Thirty-fourth street. Thad had but one misgiving, and that was that the policy king might be aware that he (the detective) lived in that street, and suspect his plot.

For that reason he kept him engaged in conversation so that he had no time to notice his surroundings until they were in front of the door.

Fortunately Banks was so elated that he suspected nothing, and they walked into the house together.

Closing the door behind him and keeping his man in the lead, Thad marched back, and in another minute ushered his prisoner into the presence of Preston!

The expression of astonishment that came over the policy king's face when he beheld his friend in irons, is more easily imagined than described.

He glanced quickly at Preston and then at Thad, and a deadly pallor came over his features, as he gasped:

"Betrayed, by Heaven!"

"Yes, you're done for, old man," sighed Preston, "and I'm surprised that a man of your cunning should have walked into a trap with your eyes open like that."

"Oh, you have nothing to say," sneered Banks. "You walked into it too."

"Not by a long shot!" retorted Preston. "I was captured by sheer force."

"Well, it doesn't matter," interposed the detective; "you both are prisoners and I have the will, and there's an end of it. I'll just trouble you to let me put on these ornaments, Mr. Edward Banks, alias Thomas Banks," pursued the detective, presenting a pair of handcuffs.

Banks demurred, of course, but he saw that it was useless, and at length submitted to being handcuffed.

"I'm really sorry we can't carry out the rest of our programme, friend Banks," smiled Burr, "but really I don't believe we'll have time to see the girl at present. Besides, since we talked the matter over I have changed my mind somewhat, and concluded to allow the two rightful heirs to take the whole of the property."

"A curse on your levity!" growled Banks. "Is it not enough to have a fellow in irons, without making him a target for your sarcasm?"

"I don't know but you are right," laughed Thad. "A man of your genius and sensibility must squirm a little under the like, and I'll desist. Besides, you require rest and quiet, and I know a person who will furnish you with both."

"You refer to the jailer, eh?" laughed Herbert.

"That's the man," returned Thad. "Come."

A few minutes later they were on their way to the Tombs, where Burr turned his prisoners over to the keepers.

He and Herbert then returned to the apartment house in Fifty-seventh street, where they had left Ned and Lottie.

To their mutual surprise, they also found Stella there.

She was anxious to know the result of Thad's expedition, and demanded as soon as he entered:

"Well, what success?"

"I have kept my promise, my girl," he replied.

"What? You haven't caught Banks so soon, have you?" she cried.

"Not only him, but your slippery papa, my dear," he returned.

"Then I am happy!" she exclaimed.

"Notwithstanding it makes you a pauper?"

"Not while I have a cent!" interposed Ned, putting his arm about his cousin.

"Ah, that is what it is coming to, eh?" laughed the detective. "I thought there was something in the wind when Lottie told me Stella had taken a violent fancy to you. But it is all right. I was young and foolish myself once."

"I too," put in Herbert, putting his arm about Lottie.

"Well, you may as well make a double affair of it," smiled Thad, shaking hands all round. "And now, here is your will. That will give you the necessary funds to be happy on, and, having completed my task, I shall bid you farewell and leave you to your happiness."

"Not yet, detective!" interposed Ned, earnestly. "Not yet, by a jug-full. We must have a little banquet, and while we are about it, let us arrange about paying you for your services."

"Very well, I shall be happy to join you in the banquet," answered the detective; "but, regarding the pay, you must settle that among yourselves."

Needless to say, in conclusion, that the banquet was a happy affair, and that every one was the happier for the knowledge that that pest of all their lives, Edward Banks, the policy king, was in a place where he could do no more harm.

As for Thad, he not only received the heartfelt thanks of all four of the beneficiaries of his hard work, but also from Superintendent Byrnes, who declared that no other detective could have performed the remarkable task.

THE END.

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